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In Love With India

BIRGITTE VALVANNE

*In Love
With India*

TRANSLATED BY
SÖLVI BATESON

Ruskin House

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Respectfully dedicated to
SIR SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN
Vice-President of India

INTRODUCTION

In 1949 my husband became the Finnish Minister in India. When we married, in 1947, he had already been in the Finnish Foreign Service for years. I, on the other hand, was a painter. It was with much apprehension, therefore, but also with great expectations, that I set forth with him on this new adventure. It was, of course, a tremendous change from an artist's life, to jump straight into the world of ambassadors and diplomats, especially in such a distant and unfamiliar country. But the adventure has been a wonderful experience, full of fun and excitement, though not without fears and sorrows. I sometimes think I have run the whole gamut of good and bad in my emotional make-up in India. One thing I have learnt there is that fundamentally human nature is the same everywhere, whether you come from the East or the West. There is not a great difference really; the things that hurt men and women in the East hurt men and women in the West just as much.

When I began this book I hoped to get my friends in Europe to share with me the seven most difficult and most rewarding years of my life. But this personal aspect became in the end the least important part of the book. What I have wanted to do most of all is to bring home to the European reader the India one only learns to understand when one has lived here for many years. If my readers manage to get from these pages some idea of daily life in India, as it is lived by the beggar as well as by the Maharaja, and in addition some understanding of how closely we are all of us related under our skins, my purpose in writing them will have been achieved.

I would like to thank Otto Mikkelsen for his invaluable help to me in revising my material.

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My Indian Friends

Indian Servants

It is usual, apparently, for every new memsahib in India to get a minor shock the first time she confronts her servants. That is what happened to me, at any rate. With beating heart I stood before a motley crowd of servants, all of them offering me their services, while I tried to decide which of them to employ. They were all equally dirty, but individually each looked so completely reliable that I was convinced they would never attempt to cheat me. I chose a chef, a first and second footman, a gardener, a driver, a night watchman, a laundry man, and finally a sweeper—to do all the rough housework, such as scrubbing floors and bathrooms, or brushing the garden paths. The first few days went off all right, and I began to think it was all exaggeration, this talk about eternal servant problems and people having been driven almost to suicide by their staff.

Although the caste system is officially abolished in India, a lot of servants are still needed, as they won't touch each other's work. There is no doubt that two Finnish or Danish maids could do exactly the same work as all my Indian servants put together. But European servants would not be able to stand the climate. They are not accustomed to doing hard physical work when it is a hundred degrees or more in the shade, as it often is in the summer. And so they would soon be worn out by continual illness, against which they would have no resistance. Eight servants sounds a lot to people in Scandinavia. But we had ten later on, and even this was unusually few for a diplomat's home in India; most Ministers have a far larger staff.

In my early days in India I begged to be allowed to do some of the housework myself and to have fewer servants, but I

soon saw that my time and the work I could do for my country were needed in quite a different sphere. In any case the change would have been bitterly resisted by the servants themselves. A new memsahib cannot know that her staff immediately bands itself together to 'educate' her, so as to assure themselves of a good time in her house. The education takes different forms. If one day, for example, you want to move a chair, you suddenly hear:

'Memsahib will lose face if Memsahib touches anything herself. Memsahib just call us, we move everything, we do everything for Memsahib.'

And you look into the large trusting black eyes, without a hint of guile in them and, disconcerted, you drop the chair and let the house-angel move it.

Or you want the furniture rearranged in a special way. This is only allowed in moderation, as there are so many things, apparently, that make the cleaning easier. You begin to feel less assured, and the servants sense it, enjoy it, and act accordingly.

This is what happened to me, as it has to many others I have known out here. After a few weeks I did not feel my home was my own. Our meals consisted practically always of what the chef preferred to make, which was cheap third-class food at first-class prices. If I asked for something else, either it was not to be had in the market, or it was too expensive. If we did not arrive punctually at meals, the food would be uneatable. Not that it was ever good.

Time after time we got the most frightful stomach upsets. If I asked whether the drinking water had been boiled. I found myself looking into fathomless innocent eyes and a low plausible voice would say:

'Memsahib must believe her faithful servants, who are doing everything for her.'

I felt ashamed and tried to believe in them once more. Some days would pass until our next internal upset, when fresh doubts would arise. Money and more money went in a steady stream from my handbag into the servants' pockets.

Indian Servants

‘Memsahib must not go to the market herself, she must not distrust her faithful servants.’

Before long various articles began to disappear from their hiding places, although we thought the keys were in a safe place. I was really beginning to wonder if there was something wrong with me rather than with the whole of my ‘faithful’ staff. But one day, when a pair of precious nail scissors disappeared, my suspicions rose to a certainty. I called the staff together and said with desperate firmness:

‘Memsahib’s nail scissors have disappeared, they are not to be found anywhere in the house.’

I had wasted an enormous amount of time looking in every nook and cranny for them without success. But they all looked at me with mild reproach.

‘Memsahib can’t believe that anything could disappear from this house? This is a good house.’

With unchanged firmness I repeated: ‘My scissors have disappeared and I want them back, even if I have to move heaven and earth to get them.’

My husband, who happened to pass through the room at this point, said in Danish, with a smile: ‘You aren’t contemplating reforming Asia, are you?’

‘No, but I do want my scissors back. They were given to me long ago by my little sister who died.’

Some days passed, with the servants not letting me forget for a moment how deeply I had disappointed them. A deep depression enveloped the house. Soon I began to find scissors in all my secret hiding places. I felt very ashamed when I found the first pair, but this passed when I found a second pair. Altogether I found four pairs of scissors. They all looked suspiciously new and none of them was my little sister’s present.

To crown it all Jack, the footman, entered the room just as I had found pair number four. Very pompously he made his announcement:

‘Madame’ (I had suddenly become Madame) ‘has suspected us of stealing a pair of scissors. We all wish to leave this house immediately.’

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We were giving a dinner party that evening for twenty-four people from the Diplomatic Corps. I felt desperate. What was I to do? With shame I must admit that I gave up. And so I told the servants:

'I have found the scissors; it is all my fault. You were quite right.'

Graciously they accepted my apology as well as an extra five rupees each, and I withdrew defeated. At last I began to realise how stupid I had been from the day the servants arrived. Anyway, the dinner party was a great success. The servants were all eager to do their best and thus show me that I had been forgiven. But I promised myself that this was the end.

Next morning, when the servants arrived in the kitchen looking forward to a wonderful day with a completely subjugated Memsahib, I was sitting in the middle of the pantry on one of their own chairs—quite an impermissible place for a memsahib to sit. I didn't say a thing; I just looked at them. Everybody suddenly became very busy and rushed round tidying up, washing and scrubbing: a joy to behold.

'Does Memsahib want tea?' somebody asked gently. But Memsahib didn't reply; she just gazed at them with all the innocence and guilelessness they had taught her, and they didn't dare to open their mouths. The chef started feverishly to wash his hands. How many hundreds of times had I asked him to do so? I am sure this was the first time he had ever touched the food with clean hands.

By entering straight into the world of the servants like this, I was able to understand for the first time how desperately poor they were. I realised then what a wonderful chance they had felt they had, trying to 'reform' us and acquiring thereby a more bearable existence. They were becoming human beings to me; before they had just been my servants, there for me to make use of.

I called them all together, and then I asked those who understood English:

'How many of you would like to stay in this house? If any of you decide to stay, alright, from today we start a new life, one of *complete co-operation*.'

Indian Servants

They all wanted to stay; they were better paid by us than they would have been anywhere else, and they would soon deal with all this nonsense the Memsahib was then talking. But I had read their thoughts. Probably my thoughts would have been the same as theirs if I had been in their place. We started discussing how we should reform 'this house'; and by degrees the eagerness for reform seized us all. 'This house', by the way, was an expression I learnt from the servants.

First of all I asked the chef and the first footman how the kitchen and pantry could be kept clean and shining. They debated this at length in their own language. Then the chef announced, with glittering eyes:

'An electric stove would change everything; if I could get one the kitchen would soon be clean.'

My husband had just asked me to look into the question of a new stove, but I didn't want to rush anything after my previous bitter experiences.

'I have been told that it is impossible for an Indian chef to manage an electric stove,' I said. 'Everything boils over and spoils the stove. How would you set about looking after an electric stove?'

It turned out that the chef knew all about electric stoves. He got very excited.

'I would always have a bucket of whitewash next to it, so that I could do the wall over if there should ever be marks on it.'

'But that wouldn't do,' I interrupted. 'Your caste will not allow you to do any whitewashing.'

'Has the Memsahib not realised yet that the caste system has been abolished in this country?'

'Since when?' I enquired carelessly. 'The day before yesterday you were all clinging to your castes.'

At this point the footman came to the chef's rescue: 'Yes, but this is a Finnish house, and we know now that the Finns can do all kinds of work. We have been here for three months and so now we are one-third Finnish.'

Pleading his own case, he continued: 'If I could get a refri-

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generator, I could always serve iced drinks to the guests and to the Master and Madame.'

My husband and I had also decided to get a refrigerator, so three very happy people set off that morning to shop for their house. The chef, to all appearances, bought his own electric stove, and Jack his own refrigerator. And I must say, to their great credit, that they both treated these new possessions with a never-failing care, perhaps because they were 'theirs' and not mine. They spent a great part of the day playing with their possessions, oiling and cleaning them. I also succeeded in getting them to decide how to manage to keep *themselves* clean, although it took many a long discussion before they actually suggested it.

Once a week we had what we called staff meetings, when I joined them and we all discussed housekeeping problems. They were allowed to decide everything in 'their' house. We were their Sahib and Memsahib, but it was 'their' house. The result was wonderful, the house was spotless, our kitchen immaculate and our laundry first-class. By co-operating with each one of them I had really got them to give of their best.

Last winter we started to improve the servants' quarters. Instead of sleeping on the floor on rags, they now have their own beds. They have been given a couple of clean blankets each. No one will ever know what it meant to me when, one day, they told me that they had saved up for sheets, just like the ones we had on our beds. That day I presented them with tables and chairs for their rooms. Last Christmas I gave them electric bedside lamps, so they could lie in bed and switch the light off and on, as they did a lot to start with. It was a great day in their lives. Later we also gave them a small radio and carpets. Kancha, our second footman, embroidered bedspreads for all the beds.

When the servants' quarters had been finished, it had one unexpected consequence. Whenever I went shopping the chauffeur followed on my heels, a thing he had never done before. And every time we went into a shop, he murmured something to the owner. I did not understand what was said except that it was the same sound every time.

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One day I asked one of the shop-keepers what it was our chauffeur was murmuring to him.

'He tells me: "This is our Memsahib, you must give her our prices".'

The usual thing was for a chauffeur to whisper to the store-keeper: 'If you want me to bring my Memsahib to your store again, you must give me a commission.'

The last time I flew to Denmark, the laundry man came solemnly up to me and asked: 'How long is the Memsahib going to stay up there by the moon?'

I told him how long it would take me to fly to Denmark, and he said: 'As long as it lasts, we will sacrifice incense to the gods and pray for our Memsahib.'

As I was going to have rather a nasty operation at home in Denmark, I told them—to be on the safe side, as it were—that even if I should die my soul would always be in 'this house' to see that everything was kept in order and that the Master's drinking water was boiled.

'Yes,' Jack said, 'we have been talking about that and we agreed that if Memsahib were to die, we would have to continue doing everything the way she wanted it; otherwise her soul would never leave us in peace.'

When the operation was successfully over, the strangest letter arrived for the Professor who had performed the operation. It ran something like this: 'Thank you, O Great Doctor, for not killing our Memsahib. We hope your reputation will travel all over the world, because you have made our Memsahib well again.' The letter was signed by all the servants who were able to write their names. The rest had put their fingerprints to it.

I know that many Europeans who know the East will say that I simply spoilt my servants. What was going to happen to these servants when the day came for a change? It does not worry me, since my servants' next memsahib will be Finnish, and as I was born a Dane I hope I will be forgiven if I say that the Finns are the best employers in the world. I know that the next memsahib will also look on her servants as human beings and give them something in return for the use she is making of them.

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*

The dhobi or laundryman had taken his son with the son's wife and six children into his quarters. The son and his wife had been dhobies in Burma, but had become homesick for India. Suddenly one day they appeared in our servants' quarters and demanded board and lodging from our dhobi. Naturally it was not easy for him to refuse his one and only much-loved son. I wondered how in the world all these people could squeeze into the dhobi's tiny quarters, but apparently they managed it. Then suddenly one day they began to *sit*; wherever I went, there they *sat*, gazing in front of them. This is a particularly Indian form of passive demonstration when something is wanted. They all looked very bedraggled and were dressed in the most tattered rags, the children, too, *sitting* in the same way. I knew the best thing to do was to pretend I hadn't noticed them. How could I possibly find further quarters for another eight people? Indian servants, however, have their own methods of getting what they want, and they always have plenty of time.

After they had been *sitting* for about a fortnight, I could not control my curiosity any longer. I called Jack, as they all had expected me to do, and asked him why they were *sitting*. He answered with great dignity:

'When does Madame propose to receive them?'

'But what is the matter?'

'Madame come and see for herself; they are living like beasts in our holy house.'

To Jack our house was always holy when he was in a difficulty. We walked down to the dhobi's house; it had always been clean when he was living alone and now it was filthy and smelly. The dhobi threw himself down in front of me and, crawling towards me, he kissed my feet.

'Your poor, poor dhobi: six years he has been in this large rich house and now he lives like a jackal in the desert,' he sobbed.

Feeling miserable, I asked Jack to help me: 'Surely I am not expected to build a house for the dhobi because he has been with me for six years?'

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They were now all sobbing loudly. They coughed and sniffed, and tears were streaming down their cheeks. I didn't know what to do. It was no good trying to get my husband to help. There could be no more money for the servants' quarters, which by now were the best in New Delhi.

'Would you go to the Master again?' I asked Jack.

'No, I could not,' said Jack. 'We Indians know when something is hopeless and we never waste our energies.'

'Well, then, there is nothing for it but to hold a staff meeting, but we will have to wait as we are having guests for lunch.'

The servants came to my room when lunch was over and, crossing their legs, they all sat down in meditative postures. I sat in a deep armchair and looked at them. I was quite aware that they were determined to have it their own way. The dhobi was catching his breath like a child that has been crying for a long time and at last has got his own way.

'Do you know how to build a hut like they do in the villages?' I began. 'They hardly cost anything, I hear.'

At the words 'hardly cost anything' they began to move about the room restlessly. After many long negotiations, we agreed that Birbal and Jack should drive into the desert to fetch large bundles of straw. The gardener, who came from one of the desert villages, knew all about the building of mud huts with stone and straw.

'Hurry up,' I said, 'the Master wants the car soon.'

It was six o'clock and my husband was due at the Legation at nine. They would just about manage it. I pushed two more men into the car to be sure there would be enough of them.

'Get four bundles of straw as fast as you can,' I told them, 'and come back here immediately.'

At eight o'clock coffee was served us by the chef himself, the only servant left in the house.

'It seems extraordinarily quiet in the house. Where are all the servants?' my husband enquired.

I had not dared to tell him I had sent his elegant C.D. car to fetch straw.

'Yes, it is rather quiet,' I said absent-mindedly.

'Will you tell Jack to get Birbal to have the car ready? I am

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not going straight to the Legation. I have to be at the Palam airport at eight-thirty to receive some international celebrity. All the Diplomatic Corps is turning up.'

The chef grasped the situation as quickly as I did. An international celebrity—and the Finnish Minister without a car! We were clammy with worry and gazed anxiously out of the window for any possible sign of the car.

At last it arrived with four dirty, tired men. The straw was removed and the car was cleaned up in record time, everybody helping Birbal to brush his handsome uniform. Through the corner of my eye I watched my husband, but he had not noticed anything. At eight-thirty punctually the car was ready, shining and spotless, with the chauffeur at the wheel and the Finnish golden lion glittering on his breast. The first footman saluted the Master and opened the door smartly. The car disappeared, and I promised myself never to do such a thing again.

*

Malien, the gardener, taught us how to make the mud hut. We all helped—the servants, their womenfolk, the children and I. The caste system had gone by the board by now and there was Jack, with his hands deep in the mud, throwing it with great zest on to the stone and straw. When he first came to us, his caste would not allow him even to mop up spilt water. At the time, I had been told that the rest of his caste would spit in his face if he did such a thing.

Long before lunch we had really managed to put together quite a presentable hut. The chef arrived with tea and we sat together on the grass and enjoyed the sight of our morning's work. We were all very proud and elated, laughing and chatting. I was sitting with my back to the entrance when suddenly I saw a petrified look on all their faces. A deathly silence prevailed: 'The Master,' they whispered. And there was my husband, standing speechless in the entrance to the servants' quarters.

'What in the world is happening here? Not a single servant in the house, no one to answer the door, not a soul. This is a

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Minister's house,' he said severely, adding in Danish to me, 'and you are the Finnish Minister's wife, you know.'

I knew that all right, although it wasn't always easy to remember.

'Look what we have done,' I said to him. 'We *had* to build another hut, there was not enough room for all the people living here.'

My husband looked at us, his eyes softening. Then, in Danish, I told him all: 'They were *sitting* and I couldn't cope with it, and as you had already spent so much on the servants' quarters I didn't feel I could ask you for another rupee.'

The Master and his guest got a superb lunch that day. We had all worked like mad, and the servants' uniforms were spotless; they wore nice, clean gloves while waiting at table. The guest—a Finnish businessman—complimented us:

'This looks an extra-specially well-run house to me. What well-trained servants Madame Valvanne has got! They can't be easy to train, I should have thought?'

My husband smiled quietly, but he didn't say a word.

'Thank you,' I said. 'I can't say I have found them too bad.'

I looked modestly down at my plate and caught a glimpse of my fingernails. I had not had time for any nail varnish after the morning's work!

*

We all hoped the sun would harden the mud on the hut, so that the dhobi's housing problem would be solved once and for all. But it rained the whole night through, a most unusual thing for that time of the year.

I woke early the next morning, full of apprehension, as I knew it would mean that all the mud had run off our hut. It was not long before there was a knock on my door, and I heard Jack's voice:

'Oh, Madame, I do not want to cause sadness, but down there they have all got pneumonia. Madame must please come down and see to them.'

I always had to attend to all the minor ailments in the ser-

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vants' quarters. Otherwise the whole of my husband's salary would have gone in doctor's fees.

'Madame must please remember to bring with her the "babywaters". They are all very ill and near the end,' Jack went on.

The 'babywaters' is the most important item in my home-made medicine chest. It is actually called Baby Grippe Waters, and on the bottle it claims to cure wind, colic, diarrhoea, colds, cramp and poisoning. To substantiate the last claim, there is a picture of a remarkably fat baby strangling a cobra with its own hands. The idea is that 'babywaters' makes it possible for even a baby to kill a snake without the slightest risk. The medicine chest also contains various remedies for dysentery and malaria. The two other bottles most frequently in use are those of magnyl and ascorbic acid. I bought them both from my chemist in Denmark, who assured me that they were neither of them in the least dangerous to use.

Jack marched in front with the medicine chest on his head. It had rained so much that it was almost impossible to get along. We went through the servants' quarters and down to our new hut, which was in a terrible state. The only bed had been turned upside down with sacks stretched over the legs so as to make a tent, but it had been of no avail and they were all soaked to the skin.

Neither the dhobi nor his family were putting on an act any longer. They were in real distress and for once completely silent. I moved them into the big servants' sitting-room. Jack put up a table and placed all the medicine bottles in a long row. In front, and all by itself, he placed the Baby Grippe Waters. All the servants gathered round with their families, their eyes fixed on the Grippe Waters. I gave the whole family a bit of this to be on the safe side. They patted their stomachs and seemed to feel better. Then I examined the dhobi's grandchildren; they had no temperatures, thank God, though there was some mucus in their throats and chests, which was bad enough. I gave them five ascorbic acid tablets each as well as half a magnyl tablet before sending Jack up to fetch six small woollen pullovers out of the children's chest. The temperature

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was under forty outside, which is very cold for India, even in winter.

One after the other the whole staff appeared before me with some injury or other. One had a damaged nail and was treated with iodine and bandaged up. One had a large thorn in his hand. Hot with fear, I hacked it out. Finally Jack's wife came up to me. She opened her mouth and showed me with tears in her eyes a whole row of rotten teeth. I remembered how at home in West Jylland we used to hold hot water in the mouth for a little while, thus soothing the pain. Brandy would have been better, but I did not dare to give it her as I knew it might make her completely unmanageable. In the olden days in Nepal an unfaithful wife used to have the tip of her nose cut off. Mrs Jack came from Nepal and I found the tip of *her* nose had been cut off. Jack assured me he had not done it, but her previous husband, and I preferred to believe him.

When my husband returned at lunch time, I told him about the state of the hut. I had simply got to get his help now. He went down and saw the mess.

'How much?' he sighed, pulling out his wallet.

'Thirty-two rupees,' Jack said quickly, getting it in before me.

'Sixteen rupees,' I corrected him.

The next morning the sun shone from a cloudless sky, and we started once more to cover the straw with mud and the whole edifice with our new sixteen-rupee roof. At last we made a good job of it. I felt a little worried at times at the thought of what the new memsahib, who was coming to the Finnish Legation in New Delhi after us, might say when she found all these extra people in the servants' quarters.

*

One night there was a magnificent thunderstorm. I was lying in bed enjoying it, when in the middle of the din I heard a faint knocking on my verandah door. How extraordinary! Could the night watchman be asleep? I tiptoed out quietly, so as not to wake my husband. I was quite right. There in a corner of

the verandah the night watchman was snoring away and at the other end of the verandah a dark figure was knocking on my window.

I rushed up and pushed the night watchman off his low chair. It is an unforgiveable sin for a night watchman to fall asleep. This man was a substitute for our own watchman, who was having a month's holiday in Nepal. Like all good night watchmen in New Delhi, he belonged to the Nepalese warrior caste, the Ghurkas. To make up for a long holiday, he had to be on duty every night for the rest of the year. His substitute was certainly a sound sleeper, not a very commendable propensity in the watchman of a Minister's house, where the job is a very responsible one. A lot of burglars seemed to think that all diplomats have more wine, cigarettes and jewellery than they need.

Looking straight at the dark figure, I called out angrily:

'Tum kaun ho? Who are you?'

The figure came nearer. This was no burglar, it was only Jack. But what a sight. He was soaked to the skin by the storm and shaking all over!

'Jack, what is the matter? Are you ill?'

'No,' a miserable voice replied, *'but she is dying.'*

'Who is dying?' I asked, horrified.

'My son's wife. She is just about to have her first baby. I tried to get a doctor, but I could not; we have no telephone. That was why I tried to waken Madame. Please come quickly, she is dying.'

We both hurried down to the servants' quarters, where Jack's daughter-in-law was about to give birth—and she was apparently dying. All the servants and their families sat around and looked terrified. Various possibilities raced through my head. I told the chef to run up and call Dr Chawla, our own doctor, and then I tried to find out what she was murmuring all the time.

'She wants the "babywaters",' Jack translated.

'Run up and get the medicine chest and bring some clean sheets. And you, Mrs Jack, put on lots of water to boil.'

As I myself have never had any children, I knew very little

about the procedure. I had only seen animals having their young at home in Denmark. Jack returned with the medicine chest and I ordered two tablespoons of 'babywater'. She looked a bit calmer by this time, but could hardly swallow any of the medicine.

The child's head had appeared, but the rest of the body could not get through. Feverishly I washed my hands; it was about the only thing I knew was absolutely essential. I knew there was something called a caesarian operation, and looked in desperation at a pair of large Ghurka knives lying on the floor, but I quickly abandoned that idea. If I pulled with all my strength, perhaps she would give way? I gathered all my strength. I don't know how I did it, but I only came to when I was standing there with a panting little creature in my hands. The child was choking, and I turned it upside down and gave it a slap on its behind, when it started breathing. The women took over the newborn child and put it into a bucket of warm water, while I had a look at the mother. She had lost consciousness. At this moment Dr Chawla appeared and gave her an injection. Smiling, he turned to me and said:

'It was a good thing you were here; she certainly would have died otherwise. She will be all right now.'

I promised myself there and then to read all I could about childbirth, so as not to risk any other person almost dying from my ignorance. I went back through the garden, and there was the night watchman snoring again! Something in me needed release, and I shook him so roughly that I don't believe he ever slept on duty again!

The next morning all the servants and their families were sitting outside my window making garlands out of yellow flowers. When I went out to ask them what they wanted this time, they said they only wanted to thank me for what I had done last night. They came up and put their garlands round my neck, saying:

'*Nomaste Mataji Meharbani*. Good morning, Mother, and thank you.'

Indian Widows

It is an old tradition in Asia for the head of the family to look after all his relations, including the widows. But it is still a hardship to be a widow in India. To this day, either in sheer fanaticism or in real sorrow, some widow will still throw herself into the flames of the pyre on which her husband's body is being burnt.

The new India is aware of the problem its widows create, and much is being done to solve it. But it is a very slow process. How slow I discovered when I went to Faridabab, where they have tried to help the widows in an organised sort of way. These widows are refugees from Pakistan. Their husbands and relatives were practically all killed in Pakistan during the great resettlement of Hindus and Mohammedans in 1947, when British rule ended.

I visited the Faridabab widows one day and I shall never forget, as long as I live, what I saw there. They were women who looked as if they had stopped living the day their husbands died. It was such an uncanny sight that I found myself wishing some of them at least might have followed the old custom and thrown themselves on to their husband's funeral pyres.

In all some 1,250 widows were living in Faridabab and by Indian standards they were living in comfortable conditions. They had nice, clean clothes, and were able to live with their children in small bungalows with two rooms, a kitchen, lavatory and bathroom. They even had electric light, a tremendous luxury in India. The house, including the water and electricity, was free, and each widow was paid 18 rupees a month. They were given free instruction in many useful crafts, such as weaving, embroidering, tailoring and basket-making. And they could

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also learn reading and writing. As soon as they had learnt enough to practise their craft, they could get contract work and were paid according to the amount they had done. Beautiful hand-woven materials were sold in the shops that the widows ran in Faridabab. Moreover the teachers were kind and capable. They had thrown themselves whole-heartedly into this work, being widows themselves, though better educated. Indeed the whole settlement had got off to a good start, and it was an excellent job of work that the New India was doing for these unhappy women. But there could be no doubt that they *were* unhappy. I could not bear to look at their eyes; they seemed to have no desire to live.

It was a strange experience to move about among thousands of lonely women, all of them without men. They seemed to be only half present, as if there was not sufficient warmth left in their veins to continue living. The whole settlement was suffused with an atmosphere of gentle, helpless resignation. Many of the widows were really beautiful, and I asked if they wouldn't re-marry one day. But I was told that this hardly ever happened. In fact I was given to understand that it would not have been regarded as quite *comme il faut*.

Round the widows' houses there were small gardens, where they had planted flowers and trees in the desert-like surroundings of Faridabad. There was also a cinema in this small community—for those who wanted such entertainment and could afford it, and a hospital where everything was free. Materially, therefore, they were better off than millions of other women in India.

The older Faridabad widows seemed to be less unhappy; they had resigned themselves to the fact that they had outlived the normal functions of life. But the younger women looked as if life had been bottled up inside them. The companionship of other women could not make complete human beings out of them. A man is usually able to live a contented existence outside a home, be it in business or in the armed services, but women only seem to blossom when they are the centre of a home.

The widows in Faridabad were not alive. The frightening

thing was that the better they were off materially, or the better educated they were, the unhappier they seemed. Money and education were no help to them at all.

*

The problem of the Indian widow is not confined to the community in Faridabad. One meets it throughout the country. One experience I had in our own immediate circle of friends made a profound impression on me. One of my closest friends was a happily married Indian woman of high caste. She and her husband were both young and were expecting their second child. They were enjoying life very much and were completely wrapped up in each other. In short, a thoroughly harmonious couple. And then quite suddenly the husband died. When I heard about it, I felt I must go and see the widow at once. I was perfectly aware, of course, that I could not be of any help to her. Indian women prefer to be alone with their sorrows. Anyway, I did go and see her. I felt I had a sort of duty to do it.

My friend had been a fêted beauty wherever they had gone, even in the highest social circles, but now it was a pitiful sight that confronted me. According to the Indian custom she was dressed completely in white, and she had to spend a large part of the day praying in a dark room. She could only eat special foods, and at unusual hours, and she already looked like a skeleton.

She met me mechanically at the door.

'They would not let me die with him,' were her first words to me. I was terribly shocked by her appearance, and so I answered quite naturally in the same way:

'How wrong, they ought to have let you die with him. You loved each other so much.'

At these words of mine, she suddenly seemed to come to life. She hesitated for a moment and then the tears streamed down her face. But her face soon set hard and she said:

'You are the first who has agreed with me.'

I got her to sit down; she looked as if she could hardly hold herself up any longer. Her hands were as cold as ice.

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'No one can understand that I ought to have died with him. You must help me. Tell me how I can die as quickly as possible.'

The strange request seemed to numb my brain, but something inside me responded:

'I don't know how to help you, but I swear that I will try somehow or other.'

'Will you help me to die as soon as possible? I cannot bear to live any longer. Every hour is torture to me.'

My Western background and prejudices seemed to recede.

'Yes, I will help you,' I said, 'even if it means dying.'

The moment I had given my promise, she was transformed. She looked for all the world like a young bride about to meet her bridegroom. I couldn't speak when I saw the transformation which had taken place before me, but I was filled with horror at the same time at what I had promised.

'Do tell me how you can help me. How soon will it be?'

In my terrible perplexity I told her to keep absolutely quiet for the next twenty-four hours:

'Try if possible to get into contact with your husband and find out from him what he wants you to do.'

I knew that many Indian women believe that by concentrating absolutely on the dead husband they can get into some kind of contact with him.

'But how can I do that?' she said.

'You have your rituals,' I told her.

Clutching desperately at the opportunity to delay things a little I added: 'Surely through them you can reach him. Pray to your *Puja'ar* and you will be sure to get into contact with him.'

I told her I would return the next day, at the same time adding:

'But you must promise me that you won't do anything contrary to his wishes. You know how brave he was, and you have one child and are expecting another. What if it should be his wish that you should take his place and bring up the children in his spirit?'

She became suspicious instantly.

'But you *are* going to help me to die?'

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Once more that terrible corpse-like look seemed to come over her and to transform her.

'I have promised you that if you really want to die I will help you. But until we have decided how it is to be done, you must go on living. You do understand what I mean? Really *live*. If you freeze up again, I cannot help you.'

She gave me her promise. It was only half an hour's walk back to my own home, but all the way it was as if I was wading in cotton wool and had no feet. I felt I hadn't the courage to tell my husband about this strange encounter. It was not that I was frightened of him, but all the same I did not feel I could possibly talk it over with him. I am always getting into strange situations that no one else can ever help me out of.

Never before had *Prithvarij Road* seemed as long as it did that day. On my return home I had to give my husband some fairly plausible explanation of the state I was in. I decided to call it an internal upset—which is something we always seem to suffer from out there. I don't know if it is the fruit that is to blame, the salads or the water.

I went straight to bed, and my husband and the servants were all full of sympathy. A little later my husband came in and suggested that he should read to me for a while.

I asked him for one of Hans Andersen's fairy tales, and he chose 'The Stone of the Sages'. It is the story of four brothers who have the strangest dreams.

The eldest brother has a wonderful dream, and oddly enough the second brother has the same dream and the third and the fourth: each of them dreamed that they had gone out into the world and found the Stone of the Sages. It shone brilliantly from their brows as they rode back to their parents' castle across the green velvet lawns.

It was a curious coincidence that my husband should have chosen this particular tale. *And they all dreamt the same dream*. If only I could dream that I was talking to the husband of my Indian friend, and that he would ask me to tell her that she must live for the sake of their children. Then I would truthfully be able to tell her so in the morning.

My husband lowered his voice and I pretended that I was

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asleep. Quietly he tiptoed out. I was alone in the dark, but the sting had been taken out of my fear. Perhaps the Stone of the Sages would help me, so long as I didn't pretend to be particularly wise or intelligent.

The morning came and once more I confronted my friend. She was a changed woman.

'I have been eating. I want to look as beautiful as I did when I was young, now that I shall see him again,' she said eagerly, looking at me, full of expectation.

What was I to do?

'Well, old Sage, you had better lend me that stone of yours,' I said out loud in Danish.

'Now,' I said quite clearly, still in Danish, 'now or never.'

'Is it an incantation?' she asked. I had obviously interested her.

'Yes, and a very strong one,' I assured her.

'But what happens next?'

'Soon, very soon, we shall know what to do.' I tried to gain time.

'And we shall know the way in which I may die?'

I braced myself; the tears were burning behind my eyelids.

'Yes, and the way you may die.'

Suddenly I knew what to do. I gazed deeply into her eyes and then said very solemnly: 'I have got the solution.'

'Please let me hear it.'

It was pathetic to see how intensely she wanted to die.

I mobilised all my will-power.

'You are not strong enough yet to hear it. I cannot tell you now what it is, but I know the solution. Tomorrow you shall know everything.'

'No, I must know it now. You know it and I must know it too.'

I hesitated: 'Well, sit down and listen,' I said. 'You do want to die, don't you?'

'Yes,' she said with great sincerity, 'I do.'

'But you are not strong enough at this moment to meet death.'

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She assured me again that she was far stronger than I realized.

‘Yes, but it is a terrible death,’ I said. ‘The worst death of all.’

‘If only I can see him again, no death would seem terrible,’ she said with conviction.

‘Now may all you Sages help me,’ I sighed aloud again in Danish.

‘Is that another incantation?’ she asked, looking at me full of confidence.

‘Yes, and the strongest of all, to give you strength to hear your sentence of death.’

Then I took the plunge.

‘You do believe that you will be seeing your husband, don’t you? And that you will meet him when you are dead?’

‘Yes,’ she nodded eagerly, ‘that means life to me; to continue to live would be death.’

‘You have pronounced your own death sentence. Repeat it.’

‘To continue to live would be death to me.’

‘I have nothing more to say to you,’ I said gently. ‘He would not have wanted you to be a coward . . .’

Once more the terrible pallor spread over her face, and I thought I had lost. We sat quietly for a long time, then she asked:

‘Could a dead woman help his children?’

‘Yes, if you are strong enough to die and yet to live. But now I am afraid you must take me down to my car. I am not feeling very well.’

I really was feeling quite dizzy after all this concentration.

‘But I never leave my rooms,’ she exclaimed, horrified.

‘Then you will have to do it now for the first time. I feel very ill. You really must help me. The servants would not be able to.’

Somehow the miracle was performed. She had not left her rooms for a month, but she came with me through the long corridors of the palace, out on to the open verandah, and then down the stairs and out to my waiting car.

‘I can’t believe that I am out in the open air again,’ she exclaimed.

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The servants crowded round her, ready to help her back again. When I was settled in my car, I saw her take a few deep breaths, and then I gave my final instructions:

‘He wanted this, so that you could look after his children.’

‘I feel so too now,’ she said quietly. ‘I know I have got to continue living.’

Before my car drove off, I whispered to her once more, just to be on the safe side: ‘Remember that part of the death sentence is that you eat and sleep.’

‘I know,’ she whispered. ‘And when my time comes I shall meet him again.’

As I drove home, I thought of an old Danish proverb. *It is better to be lucky than wise.*

I would like to add that every detail of this little adventure is true and that our talk was word for word as I have recounted it here.

III

The Game of Bargaining

‘What robbers these travelling pedlars are,’ said an acquaintance of mine one day.

‘Aren’t we all, each in our own way?’ I replied.

She looked rather taken aback. ‘Perhaps you are right,’ she said.

Of course Indian pedlars do go in for both lying and cheating if they get a chance; but the Indian concept of honesty is very different from ours. Whereas we Westerners lie quite consciously, I have often found that the lower caste Indians lie without any idea that they are doing so, when they are trying to get a few extra rupees to satisfy their hunger. Anyway, I like Indian pedlars, even if I find it rather ignominious to be swindled by them. There is something engagingly human in their bargaining, and for them it is almost a game of wits.

The travelling pedlar is much the ‘worst’. Generally they will ask at least four times as much as they are hoping to get. For my first year in India I used to feel very proud when I managed to beat them down to half what they had asked. It was only when I began to recognise a merry gleam in their eyes that I realized even this was far too much. So I learnt to go on and on. My eventual conclusion was that something between a third and a fourth of the original demand was generally about right. It was not really such a difficult game, because if you bid much too low there was a glimpse of resignation in the pedlar’s eyes and he would start to pack up his wares.

In India there is a point of balance, as it were, between buyer and seller which one must learn to sense. One of the signs that this balance has been reached is when the pedlar begins to call you mother. After that there will be no further

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reduction in the price. To an Indian the mother image spells integrity and security.

It is fascinating to watch one of these Indian pedlars wriggling through a bargaining contest like a snake. If he is suddenly underbid the sweat will pour down his face, however cold the day may be. And it is easy to guess his thoughts: 'Here am I, a pedlar for the last 30 years, and I have always managed to make a little bit of extra profit. I have got so far as to be allowed to spread out all my wares on the Memsahib's verandah. I have used all the most flattering names I know on this well-fed white lady and still I haven't hooked her!' With sweat and tears running down his face, he will say in a choked voice:

'You are my mother; do you really think a son could cheat his own mother?'

At this point one must start to give in, slowly and carefully, while watching his eyes closely. If they look too merry, the price is still too high. But he must look happy, too, and this is the crucial moment as you do, after all, want him to have some profit. However, it is no good being too confident about your skill at bargaining in India. Often enough, when I thought I had made a good bargain, the pedlar would return the next day to introduce his 'brother', so I might trade with him too. I knew then that it was the pedlar who had got the best of the bargain after all. Otherwise why should he return with this so-called brother? Naturally he would get a commission if there was another successful sale.

Many people prefer the Indian Government's shops with their fixed prices and reasonable profits. Personally I always avoid shops with fixed prices. All the game of bargaining is lost in them.

When in need of relaxation from the exalted diplomatic life, I would sometimes go off by myself in my little car to the bazaars of Old Delhi. I enjoyed these escapades. With a scarf over my head and in my shabbiest old clothes I treated myself, as it were, to a dip into this human jungle. You can find anything in the bazaars from the most precious stones to the vilest imitations. But as far as clothes were concerned there

is not much choice for a European, except in saris, though there are some wonderful rugs. But one has got to be exceptionally alert not to be cheated. One day when I was walking alone among the myriads of milling humanity in the bazaar I began wondering what would happen to me if I should suddenly be taken ill and die. I would almost certainly be burnt down by the Jumna without anyone having any idea of what had happened to me! Everybody has to be burnt a few hours after death in India.

The sudden panic with which one can be seized in a dense crowd is an alarming experience. It happened to me one afternoon in the Chandni Chauk of Old Delhi. Everything there was strange and unfamiliar. The emaciated lepers, some without arms or legs, ears or noses, the filthy but holy cows butting one in the back, the screaming children and the coughing, limping beggars. But everybody seemed to be gazing at the fat white memsahib. There was no ill feeling towards me, but to them I was a strange and peculiar sight. I came from a totally different world, and I had ventured into this jungle alone. They gazed at me, studied me closely, touched me, and came closer and closer.

It was most unusual for a white woman to walk about alone in India, particularly in Chandni Chauk. I suddenly felt very queer and faint, and then I heard voices behind me, voices which called out:

‘Gita, Gita.’

This is my Indian name, as no Indian can ever pronounce Birgitte. It was my two little beggars from Connaught Place! My feeling of loneliness and insecurity immediately vanished. In halting English the boys told me that their beggar father lived out here. Such a beggar may keep up to thirty boys whom he trains to beg for him. In return he gives them some scraps of food, a place on the floor to sleep on and a few rags. The boys told me they had to get up early every morning to walk the ten kilometres to Connaught Place to beg a few annas from the smart people there.

I have often noticed how freely Indians give to the sick and the blind, and to lepers. It is amazing, but nevertheless a fact,

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that even the meanest servants seem to have a coin for those worse off than themselves. The two beggar boys followed me around the whole afternoon. We enjoyed ourselves royally and eventually returned to my car with the strangest objects. We were loaded with straw mats, saris and antiques. I don't know who was the proudest, the boys or I, as they smilingly carried their heavy loads, telling everyone that I was 'their Gita'. Looking very important, they assured me that *they* would protect me. I was very grateful to them; they had certainly been a godsend to me in my moment of panic.

*

I always left my car some distance away from the market when I motored into New Delhi in the morning. I found it meant a lot of extra argument about prices if I drove straight to the bazaar. One morning when I was particularly busy I had to cut short my customary bargaining. I just specified the prices I was prepared to pay and added that I would give neither more nor less for the article. The shopkeeper fairly sweated with excitement. He wriggled like a cobra, but I had him virtually by the throat; there was no way round for him. At last he gave in with a sly grin. We both knew that my figure was the current price, and one that allowed him a fair margin of profit. He looked at me with admiration.

'Memsahib, old in India. Must have lived a whole life in India': the words almost exploded out of him. After which, with an appreciative grin, he handed me my change in a forged Pakistani five-rupee note.

'Would you mind giving me my change in silver instead?' I said airily.

'Not at all,' he replied gaily, and handed me five false rupee pieces instead.

I winked at him: 'I would rather have an Indian five-rupee note.'

The old rogue caught his breath—and then handed me a perfectly good note with a smile, saying: 'The rich Memsahib is really very old in India.'

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*

It may be difficult for Europeans to understand the mentality of the small Indian tradesman, but it is equally difficult for us to grasp their appalling poverty. It is a poverty completely unknown in our latitudes. A man who lives in a hut, twelve feet long and nine feet wide, with a roof that does not leak, is rich. If such a hut can boast of one bed for the entire family it is luxury, and to be able to eat till one is no longer hungry is riotous living.

One day just before Christmas a Finnish woman doctor came to call on me. While she was with me, there was a sudden terrific downpour and she turned quite pale.

‘What is the matter?’ I asked. ‘Don’t you feel well?’

‘I am quite all right, it is only that this terrible storm will mean that countless people in my district will go down with pneumonia.’

I thought of the thousands of Indians who would be trying to protect their children from such violent storms with no means whatever of doing so, and I felt one ought not to mind being cheated by the pedlars. A single extra rupee earned by lies and flattery might provide an extra rag for an ailing child or some other household necessity.

IV

Gandhi, Nehru and their Bharata

Cynics have called Gandhi a skilful politician who knew exactly how to strike the chord which would make people follow him in whatever seemed to him the right course for India. I believe the real reason why he had such enormous influence was because he was natural and honest. Intuitively he was at one with the Indian people.

Gandhi was not without faults, and did not pretend to be, but he was genuine and sincere, and that is why so many things happened because of him. He seemed to be able to understand everybody, the poorest, the richest, the most learned and the most ignorant Indian—and they understood him.

Gandhi was called Bapu, an Indian word for father. Many Indians think he is still wandering about among them. Bapu is living in this or that crossing-sweeper, or in some member of the Government, or perhaps in a learned pandit.

If in your ignorance you should happen to talk about Bapu as dead, you will see a strange light in the eyes of Indians, and they will say with a forbearing smile:

‘If you think our Bapu is dead, you must think again; oh, no, he is alive, and is very, very busy helping Bharata.’ (Bharata is the Hindu word for India.)

*

It was a strange experience to be present on a Friday evening at Gandhi’s Samadhi, the Gandhi memorial near the Jumna, where his followers meet at sunset. They sit silently in meditation there. The air seems to be purer than elsewhere at Gandhi’s Samadhi, and life seems to have lost its problems. One of the first times I went to one of these Friday sunsets, I

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had a curious experience. Here, as in any other Indian temple, one has to take off one's shoes and leave them outside the entrance. And sometimes, of course, when the temple-goer comes out, he or she will find that the shoes have disappeared. But it does not happen very often.

I recently lost a pair of my good Danish walking shoes in this way at another temple. So, when I went into Gandhi's Samadhi, I held on to my shoes. It was my only pair of walking shoes left, and I could not possibly replace them out there.

One of Gandhi's men, in the simple white robe they love to wear, came up to me and said with a smile:

'Madame, there is room for your shoes at the left of the entrance.'

I was feeling obstinate, and said:

'I know there is, but I think I will carry mine.'

'Isn't it better to leave them there,' he insisted. 'Nothing can happen to your shoes here, you know. Those who come here would never steal anything from anybody.'

Feeling rather ashamed of myself, I went back and put my shoes where he had told me to. And as I walked in the second time, I was enveloped by the strange peace which I have always felt in this memorial temple. Even my only pair of walking shoes did not seem worth worrying about.

It happened that Nehru was there that evening with some of his closest friends. It was extraordinary how soon he lost the tired expression he had when he arrived. Perhaps it was the evening sun that made him look so handsome. But I like to think he was filled with the same sense of peace that I felt.

*

A group of Gandhi's followers has made a sort of religion out of his life. This converting his ideals into doctrinal propositions seems to me to throw a shadow between Gandhi and his India. They are fine and worthy people on the whole, but I don't like the way they set themselves up as judges as to whether this follower or that is really working in Gandhi's *spirit* or adhering strictly to his teachings. Gandhi was too free and individualistic a person for anyone to try and build sects

and dogmas round him. In today's India, Gandhi's followers are doing their best to lead India in his spirit, though the situation and the problems change from day to day.

My own feeling is that India can teach the rest of the world many things it does not know and is in deep need of. But if India wants to do this, it must learn how to get into communication with the rest of the world, and the dogmas and sects are of no help at all. One cannot get into contact with the modern world through the medium of a holy man from the Himalayas. No non-Indian would understand his behaviour or his language. The voice of India will come through much more effectively from a man like Nehru, who was also Gandhi's disciple and who at the same time knows the Western world. Today many people look upon Nehru as the great arbitrator between the East and the West.

If he does not work himself to death, it is still possible that his arbitration will keep the world at peace. There seems to be no doubt at all that he is the right man for India.

*

The seven years we have been in India has seen the Indian people's feeling of responsibility towards their country grow perceptibly. The following little story will show the Indian's own great respect for 'the new India'.

Shortly after we arrived we wanted some alterations done to our bungalow. Everybody told me it would take at least six months to get it all done. This was in the early years of India's independence, when the Government and the people were both learning to use their new strength. We lived at an hotel, and though it was a good one my husband and I were sick and tired of hotel life and all that followed in its wake. When we were given a bungalow by the Government we had hoped to be able to move in the same day, but the place was in such an appalling condition that I had to procure some workmen. Walls had to be pulled down, verandahs covered in, as well as other alterations, to make the place habitable. But none of the workmen arrived on the promised day. It was just as our friends had prophesied. So I decided to find out who em-

ployed the various workmen, and eventually got the carpenters', painters' and electricians' employers to come to tea at our hotel, where I made them the following speech:

'We are strangers in your country. You represent the New India to us. We have a bungalow which must be ready in a fortnight. Is this possible in this New India of yours? I don't want you to promise me anything you cannot do; but if the house is ready a fortnight from now, by the 1st of July, I will give a dinner in your honour and I will tell everybody I know that you are quicker than the workers in any other country. People here tell me that you will need six months to do this job, but I have refused to believe that you will need such a long time.'

For half an hour they discussed at length how they could work without getting in each other's way. At last they told me that they would take the job on and finish the bungalow in a fortnight. They promised to make a good solid job of it too.

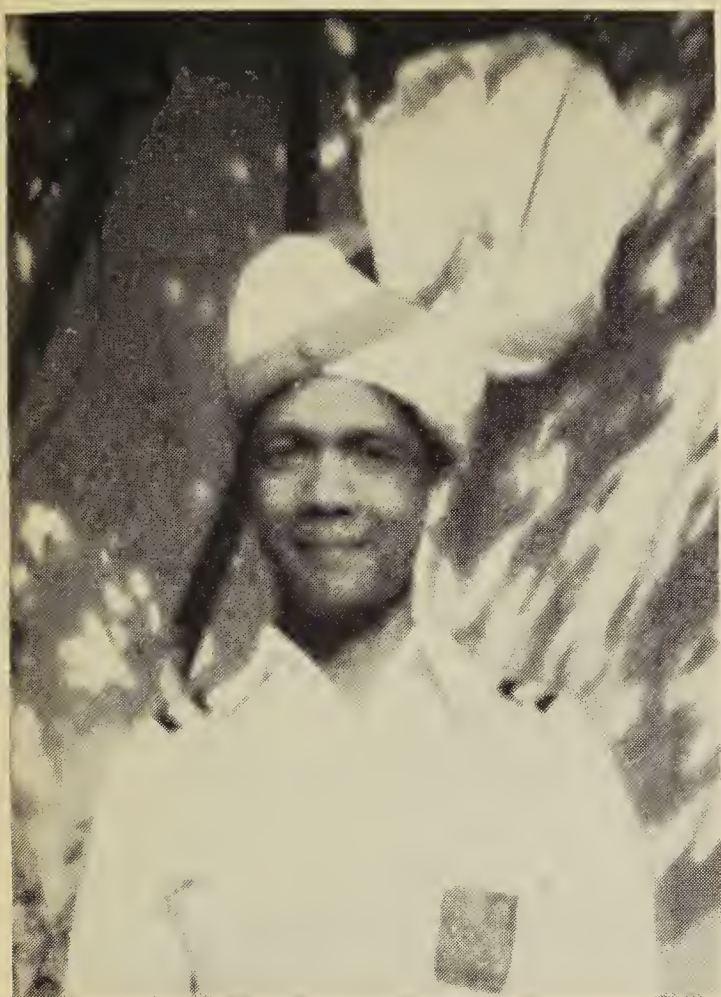
It was going to be hardest for the cabinetmaker, who was notorious for never finishing anything. Now he had to make furniture for the dining-room, the drawing-room and the library in a fortnight.

'But,' he said, 'if the New India is at stake, I want to join in with the others.'

He looked rather like a prophet, with his long, white beard and burning eyes. He was ninety-four years old but still the head of his firm, and was up at four o'clock every morning and working until six in the evening. A strict vegetarian, and a true son of India.

This was my first encounter with the workmen of India. The next day they swarmed into 39, Prithvarij Road. I ran a regular shuttle service between Old Delhi, where the furniture was being made, and New Delhi, where our bungalow was being rebuilt. I told the workmen that people were smiling at us and that no one thought the bungalow would be finished in time.

'But *they* obviously don't believe in the New India,' I said. Never before or since have I seen such a tempo in India.



1. Our ever-laughing Nepalese servant. 'Madame puts on such strange face when she gets angry . . .'



The Dhobi: 'Memsahib always thinks the worst of her clever Dhobi.'



The cook and the footman Jack at a party at the residence.



2. Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, to whom this book is dedicated, with me at a reception in the residence in New Delhi.
(Punjab Photo Service)



Premier Nehru and my husband at the Finnish legation.

Without realizing it I had touched the right chord. They all worked so hard that I could not help feeling sorry for them.

'I think you had better take another three or four days over the job,' I said. 'You are doing more than your best.'

But they wouldn't hear of it. Everything would be finished so that we could move in on the day the New India had promised. And so it was.

The following day the employers got their dinner; there were speeches and they were all very proud. Old Ravi quietly confided in me:

'Whatever happens to me the rest of my life, never again will I take on such a job!'

He had had 150 workmen to help him, he said, and they would never have done it if they had not worked in shifts right through the night. Anyway, the New India had kept its promise.

I have recounted this episode just to show how ardently the ordinary Indians want to help in the present-day India. One can get an Indian to do almost anything if one talks to him about his own country, which he loves with a deep and spontaneous sincerity.

*

What about the great men of the New India? I know most of them personally and find they have one characteristic in common: they never spare themselves. They all work tremendously hard.

One evening I was sitting next to Nehru at a dinner party in his own house, when I found myself in a difficult position. There he sat, so dead tired that he could hardly keep up an interest in the banal dinner-party conversation. I was at a loss to know what to talk to him about. With heavy, tired eyes he threw me a few nice polite remarks, which I answered with monosyllables.

Suddenly I swallowed my shyness and told him that a few evenings before I had seen a television programme of his visit to London. He had seemed so vital, answering all the questions about present-day India that had been fired at him by journalists from all over the world. I told him this and added that I

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felt I had then seen what he really was, fully and sincerely Bharata's son, and that it was a sight I would never forget as long as I lived.

Nehru seemed really happy at what I had said. It warmed him and his fatigue seemed to vanish. He told me how the concept of time can cease to tyrannise us, if we do not let it get the upper hand. He told me about the period of his life that he had spent in prison for his political views. He felt it to be the only occasion in his life when he had ever had enough time, and for some reason this seemed to have released something within him. He did not know which had been worse, living in solitary confinement or being one of sixty people in a single cell; he had experienced both. In prison the concept of time did not exist for him. Although he had been there for many long years he always used to think: 'I arrived yesterday'. There seemed to be no days between. But one day he suddenly began to think about time, and then he realized that it was months since he had heard a dog bark or a child cry.

He talked warmly and vividly about nature and his visits to other parts of the world. It was always nature he assimilated first and the people in some sort of harmony with nature. He told me that if ever so unusual a thing happened as a free afternoon, it was as if a blissful eternity stretched before him. We talked for a long time about literature and art, and differences in temperament.

'Who has the quickest temper, Mrs Pandit (Nehru's sister) or you?' I asked.

He laughed out loud and turned to his daughter, who was sitting opposite us:

'Madame Valvanne would like to know, who has the quickest temper, my sister or I?'

'Oh, I think you would win,' Nehru's daughter replied amid general laughter.

*

India has not yet lost its primitiveness; I found it a release to discover customs and opinions which seem strange to us and

so rid myself of some of my complacency.

It is odd that India's many sharply divided religious sects have not influenced the national character. Everybody is free there to believe in everything or nothing. The Indians seem to obtain much comfort from their belief in gods, fate and a re-incarnation to carry on the everyday burden of life. One may hear people, meeting for the first time, who feel mutually attracted to each other and say:

'Of course, we are friends from earlier incarnations. It is indeed wonderful to meet again in this life.'

This gives them a sense of security and of belonging together.

J. K. Birla, the man who has built so many new temples, did not build them to please the gods alone. He knew the inspiration and joy the Indians derive from being able to remain for a while every evening near the gods in whom they believe. The day may come when Indians, too, will leave their temples empty, but it will be because they have realised that their gods are everywhere, even within themselves. The reason for our own half-empty churches is perhaps that Christianity no longer inspires us enough. We leave our churches without having discovered that God lives within us and is present everywhere.

In spite of the many things that draw one to Europe, it has been a constant joy to me to live in India. I envy the Indians their warm belief in their gods, the way they live their lives and all their magnificent temples. To us Europeans time has become a tyrant, to the Indians it is still a friend, dwelling among them to their constant joy and pleasure.

An Indian can always make something out of the little he has got. I have often seen ten or even fifteen people perfectly happy in one very small room—happy for no other reason except that they did not have to sleep in the street.

If an Indian owns a bicycle it becomes a luxurious means of transport for the whole family. The father in front with the biggest child on the handlebars, the mother sideways on the luggage grid, in a flowing sari, with the youngest on her lap! This kind of overcrowding was prohibited by law, but even the most law-abiding policeman had a way of looking in

the opposite direction when a small family like this was on its Sunday outing to the Jumna. He would not stop the bicycle and let the air out of the tyres, as the law required, unless a superior officer was in the offing.

Those who own a motor-car belong to the luxury class, but it is out of the question for an ordinary Indian. If a small shop-keeper should be lucky enough to obtain an old rattle-trap of a car, then all his relations will expect to share his miraculous means of transport. One could often count up to twenty passengers in one car, most of them children. The owner of a car is someone of importance and speed stimulates his self-assurance, so that pedestrians have to scatter quickly.

*

In spite of their appalling poverty the children of Bharata lead a fairly happy existence. They are on friendly terms with the days and with their neighbours as a rule. They can hardly be bothered to gossip; there are so many much more entertaining things to do. They have plenty of children and very little money, and how to fill all these little stomachs is their one overwhelming problem. There is also, of course, the question of the children's marriages, which all conscientious parents take very seriously. The continuation of the family and the future of the next generation must be ensured. To preserve the family is almost as important as food. In the upper classes, however, it has recently become more usual for the young to choose their own partners. But even among the young and progressive there is a traditional respect for the opinions of the parents, and they will still listen to the advice of their elders before making their own choice.

The tie between parents and children in India is strong and deep. If a man suddenly comes into a lot of money or rises to an important position, then he knows, and all the family knows, that it is his duty to provide properly for every one of his relations. This is a foregone conclusion. We are of the same blood, hence we belong together. It is as simple as that.

The Flowering Desert

Early one morning we were flying over the Rajputana Desert in Mr Birla's luxurious private plane. My husband was leaning back, relaxed in a deep armchair covered with silk brocade. He was talking eagerly to the British High Commissioner, Mr Malcolm Macdonald, about the amazing progress in Delhi during the seven years he had lived there. Mr Macdonald looked impressed and they were having a lively discussion. There were deep armchairs at my end of the plane, too; the teak tables were polished like glass and thick carpets covered the floor.

Two Indian women of high caste were sitting beside me. They were about thirty-five years old, but still very beautiful, and their clothes were in exquisite taste. Ananda Rajan wore a heavy scarlet silk sari with wide gold borders, a pale yellow silk blouse and a 200-year-old Kashmir shawl, which was covered all over with hand-embroidered flowers. Her diamond ear-rings glittered in the morning sun; her numerous clinking bracelets were a sign that she was a married woman. As she had been born and bred in South India she wore a magnificent diamond in her nose and a red spot on her brow. And in her shiny coal-black hair, parted in the middle, she wore a garland of white, sweetly-scented flowers. The nails of her delicate little toes were painted the same colour as her sari, and on one toe she wore a small silver ring—another sign of her married status.

'How many saris do you think you have?' I asked her bluntly.

'Perhaps a couple of hundred,' she replied carefully. 'You see we often inherit family saris.'

'Are saris always in the fashion?' I continued.

'Oh, no, the fashion changes quite often. Besides, every part

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of the country has its different sari. You can practically always tell in what part of the country a sari is woven.'

I glanced at Rajani Rajan, the other Indian woman. She was just as exquisitely dressed and talked eagerly about her small daughter.

'She is just seven, but she already talks five languages—*Telugu*, my own language, as well as *Tamil*, *Hindi*, *Punjabi* and *Gusheela*.'

We were flying over the Jaipur Mountains at that moment. They were among the oldest mountains in the world, colossal and unapproachable before the Himalayas saw the light of day, though now they are almost level with the ground. Thousands of years of wind and weather and natural catastrophes have ground down the hard granite. The low mountains now look exactly the same colour and shape as loaves of rye bread just out of the oven.

*

We circled over Pilani before landing. One of Mr Birla's sons, who was born out there, had built this college town. There had been no possibility of any kind of education there in his young days, so he had decided to build a college in the desert. He had first, of course, to amass the wealth required for this project, but now he flew his own plane over the vast white university town, the realization of his youthful dreams, with its 6,000 students from all over India. It was an oasis in the desert and everything looked green and flourishing.

We landed at the Birla family's private aerodrome, where four large, luxurious cars were waiting to take us into Pilani. We then drove along a narrow sandy road to the town, passing numerous camels. The riders sat as if they were fixed to their saddles for ever, swaying in unison with the rhythm of the camel, all of them grey with dust, although the women still looked like brilliant-coloured flowers. We were told that nowhere else in the whole of India do the women wear such magnificent colours as in Rajahstan. No one seems to know why; perhaps it is to compensate for all the drab greyness around them. The women are often beautiful, and they look

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strong and determined. They have none of the urban woman's refinement and culture, and have grown up accustomed to hard work. Through generations the soil has been forced to yield everything necessary to maintain life. What a magnificent carriage these women had! They carried the heavy baskets on their heads with truly regal poise.

While driving through the desert, Mr Birla told us:

'If we had sufficient water here, we could turn the Rajahstan Desert into a paradise. In the few places where we have water we can even grow wheat.'

The architecture of the town was pleasing. Even the village huts had a certain dignity. There was a multitude of black goats everywhere.

'Are we getting near to Jaipur?' I asked Mr Birla.

The goddess Kali has a magnificent marble temple in Jaipur, and as she has to have black goats for breakfast every day, this is the explanation of the ubiquitous herds of goats. The door leading into her palace is made of massive gold, about three feet thick and twelve feet high.

There is also a multitude of sheep everywhere, since weaving is the great home industry of the region. The beautiful shawls and saris that are made there are sold all over India.

In front of the Birlas' private bungalow, which was among the shiny white college buildings, the servants in white uniforms with gold-brocade turbans were lined up to greet us in two long rows. They saluted us very solemnly. At the top of the stairs the head butler scattered rose petals over us as we reached him, the servants behind him adorning us with garlands while other servants offered us the most wonderful fruits and iced drinks from silver salvers.

In the banqueting hall there were some indifferent life-sized paintings of the Birlas with Gandhi, Nehru and other heroes of modern India. Signed photographs of Mr Birla with Sir Winston Churchill and the Earl and Countess Mountbatten adorned the wall.

Outside the fountains were playing and all the most beautiful flowers the Indian winter can produce seemed to be bursting out of the ground. It was indeed a flowering desert.

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We drove out to have a look at the college town, and if there had been a trace of criticism in my heart it rapidly vanished in the fresh winter breeze from the plains of Rajahstan and at the sight of the Montessori school. It was impossible not to feel elated at something so absolutely right. We were a party of ten inspecting a class of children all between the ages of four and six. Garlanded as we were, we must have looked like wandering flowerbeds, and every one of us carried a camera; but the children did not seem to notice us at all. Now and again their black eyes might wander in our direction, but it was without any noticeable interest. In this class the children were allowed to do whatever interested them most. Some were making camels, elephants and monkeys with bricks, others were using water colours, painting the fantasies of any four or five-year-old boy or girl. They all used very brilliant colours, much brighter than any European child is accustomed to.

The teacher told us that they were all concentrating so hard that they had to be almost shaken back into reality when it was time for them to leave. The boys wore blue shorts and pale blue shirts hanging loose outside. The girls were dressed in the same way, only the skirt indicating their sex. The Sikh boys had their hair tightly plaited and tied with red ribbons just like the girls.

I was told that Maria Montessori had been to Pilani and that she had herself designed the classrooms. The walls were covered with colourful pictures of all kinds of animals, gods and demons. The children obviously enjoyed drawing the threatening demons just as much as the more benevolent gods. They were too young for the pictures to mean very much to them on a religious plane.

It was amusing to see their dormitories. In every wall a large square hole had been cut. The teacher's room was in an extension of the dormitory, and he could see the feet of his pupils through the holes. Thus, they did not know that they could be observed and they behaved as freely as if they were alone. Generally speaking the children did not seem to take much notice of the adults. The teachers told us that the children

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learnt things by making a game out of them. They were learning the art of living this way, hence their great concentration in everything they were doing.

I left the class-room with a sigh—I would have given a lot to be one of them—and I continued to explore the other class-rooms on my own. In one large room I found the children occupied with everything under the sun—there were paintings, easels, materials, embroidery, looms and workbenches. The whole thing looked chaotic, but I was told it was here the children learnt to work in a community with all its noise and din. Here they were taught to feel a part of the whole. The children were hammering away on tin pans, sawing and planing and weaving. Dogs and cats ran in and out between their legs. How in the world had grown-ups, set in their own tastes and habits, thought out anything so wonderfully crazy as this? It was so alive, so full of growth, and all the children looked so keen and healthy, each busy with his own job and enjoying it. Laughter rang through the room above all the other noises.

They seemed to be enjoying themselves in most of the class-rooms I entered. Although they had all been provided with the usual school desks, they preferred sitting in the most unusual positions—most of them with their feet on the bench, a characteristic Indian posture when resting. The teachers stood behind their desks in the respectable, orthodox way, but they looked as if they were enjoying themselves as much as did their pupils.

In one large class-room the children were busy working on their own inventions. Some of the pupils were already competent mechanics, and they came up to me and showed me their inventions. One had invented a new gearbox for the Birla family's cars. Another had experimented with the dyeing of materials, and he had found colour combinations which were unusually handsome as well as original. My admiration was deep and real.

Any child of four can be admitted to the school, and they can stay until the age of 24. The headmaster told me that their

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greatest problem was the pupils' reluctance to leave when their education was finished.

*

When we gathered for an early dinner in the Birlas' bungalow, I took the opportunity to go out into the hall, where I had seen the portraits of the Birla ancestors. I wanted to apologise, as it were, for what I had felt about the portraits earlier in the day before I had seen the school. People with the intelligence and kindness to create a school like this one in Pilani can allow themselves some personal vanity.

This is the kind of school that is needed all over India. I know there are Montessori schools all over the world, but this one out in the Rajahstan Desert, with its 6,000 pupils, made a stronger and more enduring impression on me than any school I have ever seen anywhere, perhaps because it had been built in the middle of the barren desert where nothing had been able to grow before. To me it became symbolic of the new India in which I have such confidence.

Everyday Life In India

Duties and Pleasures

Recently I came across this sentence in a description of modern India: 'In New Delhi the elegant CD cars carry day and night their well-groomed, jaded contents up and down the broad boulevards . . .'

It was only too true. Day *and* night! If it was only the one or the other, but it was literally both day and night. It was an understatement, however, to say we were merely 'jaded'. We were often limp with fatigue. We were certainly well-groomed; that was part of our job and, as it were, our uniform.

Before I came out to India I had lived the life of an artist for years. I had often thought *that* was strenuous enough; but it was soon clear to me that the life of diplomats and their wives was far more exhausting and demanding. Its worst feature was that one hardly ever had any privacy. Breakfast was as a rule the only meal my husband and I could hope to have without interruption. We usually had it in the garden. Throughout the winter the garden was full of roses, cornflowers, sweet peas and all kinds of cactus from the desert. We also had three pines, fetched by Jack, our butler, all the way from Mussoree. They made the same sound as our pines at home in Jutland. It was only the cries of the crows that broke the illusion. They weren't robust and healthy like those of Danish crows.

Breakfast was the high spot of our home life, but even this could be hectic, when one or both of us had to be present at a reception of international V.I.P.s at the Palam airport. When Bulganin and Kruschev arrived the whole of the diplomatic corps had to be lined up.

What a reception these two statesmen had! In my seven years in India I saw many magnificent receptions, but never

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anything like this one. It was as if the whole of India had turned up to receive them. The twelve miles from Palam to Delhi were lined with about two million people. Children from all the schools in Delhi were there to welcome them, in nice clean school uniforms, waving the Indian flag. For days and nights beforehand the people had driven great distances in their primitive ox-carts. They cooked their meals and slept in small tents made of sacks and old rags all along the road to Palam.

*

But to return to our breakfast. This was practically the only time we had a chance to talk together, though between receptions and parties there were occasionally some minutes of peace in the car, where neither the telephone nor people could intrude on our privacy. These drives often became our nearest approach to home life and with some ingenuity a great many things could be discussed during these brief moments. But let me describe an ordinary morning. From eight o'clock till ten I would inspect the whole of the house and garden. The servants would then get their instructions. New and delicious dishes were described to the chef, the flower arrangements for the dinner party next day were inspected, the tailor was reprimanded and the chauffeur given a warning that the car had not been properly cleaned for several days. The sweeper might also have to be reminded not to sweep the garden paths in the morning when all the windows were open. To teach an Indian sweeper to water the paths before they are swept is practically impossible; I gave it up long ago. He would only continue to do it the way sweepers have done for the last thousand years. And the laundry man would have to be roused to action as so often before. We were so accustomed to this sort of thing that I think we would have missed our little *contretemps*.

‘Dhobi, you are drunk again,’ I used to start off.

‘Memsahib always thinks the worst of her clever Dhobi,’ he would then reply with shining eyes. ‘Dhobi good, the best dhobi in the whole of India.’

‘Yes, but you must not drink so much. It is nearly ten years

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since most of your children died, and more than fifteen years since you lost your wife.'

This last remark would usually serve its purpose and rouse him from his stupor into loud sobs:

'Yes, they have all gone. Never, never again will they come back to poor dhobi.'

'But surely, dhobi, you believe that we return to this earth many times, don't you? If you are a clever dhobi you won't be born again as an animal; you might become a head dhobi in your next life, and then you would be able to give your children a sahib education.'

This bit about sahib education was an important feature in our exchanges. As he was trotting off to do our laundry, I would hear him murmuring 'Sahib education' all the way.

'Don't forget, it might only be half a sahib's education if you don't rinse the laundry,' I would call after him.

'No, no, please! Full sahib education,' he would add pleadingly. I usually nodded graciously and promised him generously a full sahib education. Through the open windows in the laundry I could sometimes hear the dhobi's monotonous voice as he was bending over the washtub: 'Sahiber, sahiber, sahiber, sahib.'

*

The servants and I had our share of excitement during these two morning hours; they were certainly never dull. Some days, of course, were more exciting than others. Putting all one's imagination into the relationship and entering into their joys as well as their sorrows could pay its own dividends. One day we had to move some large shrubs in the garden. Everybody had to help. The gardener and the sweeper were moving a large tuja when a black cobra suddenly reared its ugly head. There was a deathly silence, as the snake swayed its head a couple of yards away from one of the servants and only about three yards from me.

'Quick, kill it, Jack!' I whispered, terrified.

'I am not allowed to, Madame. I am a Hindu and must not take life.'

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'You kill it, then, chef. You are a Christian.'

'I can't do it either, I am both a Christian and a Hindu.'

At last the night watchman, the Ghurka from Nepal, came running up with a large stick and hit the cobra with great force across its back. I felt quite paralysed for a while, but eventually I asked Jack to remove the snake. He returned very quickly after having disposed of it, and I felt instinctively that all was not as it should be.

'Where is the cobra, Jack?'

'It is no longer on our property, Madame. It is far down the street,' he added reassuringly.

'But was it quite dead?'

'Dead and dead, Madame. It will soon die . . .'

'But if a sweeper should happen to tread on it, what then?'

'Yes, Madame. But what to do?'

This was Jack's favourite expression when he was in a difficulty.

'Go along and get it at once,' I said sternly.

A few minutes later the cobra was once more in our garden. We made quite sure that it was stone dead before it was buried in a deep hole.

Perhaps it was the same cobra that had visited our Sauna (Finnish steam-bath) a couple of days before. The Legation staff had brought an Indian doctor who had expressed his desire to try the marvels of the famous steam-bath. Suddenly a cobra wriggled quickly in and out among their naked legs. It disappeared down the drain-pipe that led into the garden. When the bathers came up to the house for a cup of coffee after their bath, they seemed very subdued, not at all in their usual high spirits. The Sauna was carefully searched and the hole by the drain-pipe filled in.

One day the dhobi came screaming up from his quarters. He usually kept his tobacco high up on a shelf, and when he stretched up to take down the tin he touched a large fat snake. He was in such a state that we felt sure he had been bitten. It took some time to pacify him and to deal with the snake.

It was a strange experience to be memsahib and 'mother' to all these servants and their families. I must admit that I



3. My step-daughter, Maria, receives a riding prize from the President of India. Maria came from Finland and went with us on the trip to Nepal. (Punjab Photo Service)



C. Rajagopalachari, Governor-General, at a reception in the legation. Between us is my husband. (Punjab Photo Service)



4. Finishing a painting from India in the studio at 'Gamle Praestegaard'.

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quite enjoyed it. I tried to be as fair as I could, but as I am endowed with a quick temper there was often action before proper thought.

For several years I carried on a feud with the men who swept the street outside the house. They had got into the habit of breaking branches from our thick hedge to sweep the street with; the unpleasant effect of this was that the street dust blew into the house and the garden. One day I saw one of them once again climbing over the wall to break off some branches; all his friends were waiting, full of expectation, to see how the ferocious memsahib would react. Enraged, I flew out of the house and seized the fellow by the scruff of his neck and threw him over the wall. The Indians are not very heavy and the wall was not very high. On this occasion I jumped after him, seized him once more and then shook him thoroughly. The others were watching us, stiff with terror. They were probably expecting their turn to come too, though in fact it did not. After that our hedge was left in peace. Thank heavens the shrubs in that part of the garden were so dense that no one else had seen the incident.

*

One of my many morning chores was the fight against our worst enemy, the white ants. They appear unexpectedly from any nook or cranny. In an astonishingly short time they can hollow out all the books in a bookcase and cause countless other disasters. One may have no idea of the ants' presence before opening the bookcase; then the books just collapse into dust. We had tried every possible means to rid ourselves of these ants. Every kind of preparation, cheap or expensive, was bought, and we listened to everybody's advice. But it was all of no avail. One day I suddenly thought of two remedies we used at home for getting rid of wasps. We either burnt the wasps' nest, or else we poured boiling hot water over it. As the ants had settled in the cracks of the walls I decided to try the boiling water method. All our 3,000 books were carried outside, dozens of buckets of hot water were heated, and paraffin was mixed into the boiling water—which then was poured

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over the unconquerable little beasts. Since that day not a white ant has been seen in our library. But Hugo informed me that the whole place stank of paraffin.

Everything takes time in India. The smallest repair in the house becomes a major operation. One day I telephoned to a firm for a new washer for one of the bathroom taps. Three men arrived with it. They remained in the bathroom for four hours before they discovered that the washer they had brought did not fit. I asked Jack to find out why they had not discovered this sooner, but they did not even bother to reply to such a futile question. I telephoned to the manager of the firm and explained the situation. He was very pleasant and said reassuringly:

‘If the washer does not fit we will not charge you for either the washer or the workmen’s time.’

I tried to explain to him that it was my great interest in modern India that made me inquire why he had sent three men. He explained patiently that a skilled worker never carries his own tools, and that there must always be two skilled men on a job, in case one of them cannot manage the job. Then the other one can take over.

‘Is there anything else I can do for you, Madame?’

‘Yes. I would like a washer that would fit my bathroom tap. Do you happen to have more than one size?’

‘Of course,’ he replied eagerly. ‘But why didn’t Madame ask me to send various sizes? How could I know what size Madame wanted?’

‘How right you are. I am entirely to blame,’ I said, for I had given up.

‘If Madame will give a more definite order another time there won’t be any misunderstandings,’ he said.

The next day three men arrived to change some lamp fittings. I didn’t feel like the idea of this crew sitting about for several hours as the others had done, so I sent back two of them. But what a to-do! The remaining man assured me that he could not possibly mount the ladder unless someone held it. I demonstrated to him that even I could stand on the top

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of the ladder without any difficulty, but he dismissed this with a gentle smile:

‘But Muhammed could not do that, Madame. Muhammed falls down immediately, for Muhammed is very giddy.’

The end of it all was that I had to let one of my servants hold his ladder and another one reach him his tools. When the bill arrived, it was of course for half a day’s wages for three men. Two of them certainly had had a nice holiday.

*

Other chores on a typical morning would include visits to the wives of ambassadors, while before lunch some Indian ladies might call.

I usually changed into a simple frock, hat and gloves, and no jewellery as prescribed in the protocol. While driving along I would try and persuade myself that such visits might be enjoyable, especially if the new ambassador’s wife was having the usual staff troubles, so that I might be of some help and comfort.

My first call one day was on the wife of an ambassador from the Far East. She was new to India and would certainly be helpless and miserable, I decided, and I felt quite cheered at the thought. A guard saluted me by the entrance, and I nodded graciously as a servant rushed up and opened the door for me, and showed me into the salon. There I heard some rustling behind me and when I turned—behold, a fairy-tale princess had slipped noiselessly into the room! Her hair was gathered in a beautiful knot on the top of her head. The soft colours of her Eastern dress went beautifully with the mother of pearl complexion of her perfect and indescribably lovely face. With a peal of gay laughter she said:

‘You look so surprised.’

‘Yes,’ I said, forgetting all my diplomatic etiquette. ‘You are the most ravishing person I have ever come across.’

Another peal of laughter.

‘I am so happy to be here in New Delhi that I am willing to do anything that is asked of me. I will gladly be dragged round everywhere. This is the first time I have ever been outside my

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own country. My husband expects me to do everything with him and I'll do it with pleasure. Everything is so extraordinarily interesting and exciting.'

I sank down on to a sofa and she sat down gracefully beside me.

Are you satisfied with your servants? Have you got air conditioning? Will you be going up to the mountains in the summer? Are you going to have your children with you here? And all the rest of the stock questions. How could I possibly put all these banal questions to this fairy-tale princess? I didn't. Before I had decided what to talk to her about, she had opened the conversation with a cascade of unexpected and unconventional questions, and before long we were talking naturally and gaily without a thought of diplomatic rules and regulations.

My next call was on the wife of an ambassador from a Western nation. Everything was simple and beautiful there. The servants' livery looked more like an army uniform than anything else. The door was opened wide and I was told to sit down. Obediently I flopped into a magnificent antique sofa with a strong smell of Flit. Her servants ought to be told not to use so much of it, I thought mechanically while I was taking a look round. It was not too clean; the dust was lying in thick layers everywhere. It was most likely the servants who ruled the house here. She kept me waiting a quarter of an hour. Suddenly she appeared. It was not difficult to see that she was a woman of the world to her fingertips.

'How is it that I have never met you before?' she inquired in a tired voice.

I told her I had been away with my husband to Ceylon, Burma, Siam and Indonesia, and that I regretted not having been able to call on her before. Everything in India was wrong—the climate, the servants and the shops, and as for the Diplomatic Corps here in the East, it seemed just a lower caste. Everything was so different from what she was accustomed to.

With my most innocent face I confided to her my delight that she of all people should have come out to India, and stressed what a tremendously important task she had. With

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the fine culture of her own great country behind her, she might succeed in reforming large parts of Asia. It was natural, sympathetic and warmhearted people like herself who were so badly needed in India today.

At first she looked at me as if she thought I was making a fool of her. But then her eyes suddenly began to shine and she said:

‘Of course, there is nothing I would rather do than try to help India by raising the standard of her Diplomatic Corps here in New Delhi . . .’

I thought of the fine, capable diplomats in New Delhi. Perhaps they would be able to teach her something, too. She enlarged on the subject of what the behaviour of a diplomat and his wife ought to be. When the prescribed quarter of an hour had elapsed, I hastened to bid her goodbye. We had only had time for a superficial acquaintance. She would become a lonely soul here in India, I thought on my way home, if she did not learn that a diplomat’s wife must also be a human being.

*

My Indian visitors that morning belonged to a well-known Indian family, and they were all dressed in handwoven saris with no other jewellery but a few bracelets. We had known each other for several years and were good friends, and so we could talk naturally and with ease about our joys and worries. They brought me Indian sweetmeats in beautifully decorated boxes. One of them brought me a mascot from an *ashram* far out in the jungle, where she had just been. Another brought holy water from the Ganges. Apparently, if one sprinkled just a few drops of this over oneself one would be saved for ever and ever.

I promised to go with them to evening service in the Birla temple. I always enjoyed going with them, for their religion seemed to become a real thing to me there. It was as important to them as their daily bread. In such families it was not unusual for the men to withdraw to Benares or the jungle when they were getting old and felt the end to be near. They wanted to leave their worldly responsibilities behind, and so

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they would withdraw to the loneliness of the temples, or an *ashram* in the jungle, to try and find the way into the Fire of Creation. One of these women told me that if her husband should go off one day, she would also seek refuge in an *ashram* where women were allowed, so that their spirits might join there.

One day, when my guests were leaving, their car was prevented from driving up to the entrance by a funeral procession which was passing on the road. Only men carried the coffin and only men followed it; they were laughing and talking to each other as they walked along. I asked why no women were following the coffin. The answer I got was an odd one: 'Because they would only cry.'

When the funeral procession had passed, my visitors' car could at last drive up. As we bade each other farewell, I handed them each a little gift of the Finnish biscuits they loved. I always made sure the boxes were in their own hands. Usually their servants carried everything, but I had told them that where I came from, one always carried one's own gifts. This they used to find very amusing and the servants were not allowed to touch my little presents.

*

The afternoon was often filled with duties: exhibitions, school visits or perhaps I had to lecture to Indian women about Finland. One day, I remember, we had no less than eleven invitations. During our tour round a large exhibition I nearly fainted from fatigue.

'Do let us miss a few of our engagements this afternoon,' I implored my husband, 'and then we could have a peaceful time at home for a change.'

'You forget,' he said, 'that the Finns are a tough and hard-working people. You will have to try and keep going.'

The social functions that took up so much of our time were very exhausting. I had to keep on telling myself that it was a part of the job. There was hardly any time to cultivate one's personal friends. That was why so many of the diplomatic wives were lonely in spite of all their social life.

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At the State dinners as a rule one had a fixed place all the season through, either between two diplomats or between two members of the Government. A whole winter I sat next to a popular and charming Indian General. Our conversation circled invariably round the topics of art and philosophy.

It was hard to be tied to two subjects for two whole hours once a week. One evening I simply couldn't stick it any longer.

'Please tell me, why is it you always keep to these two subjects?' I blurted out.

'Good gracious, I thought these were your all-absorbing interests. I had been told so, too,' he said, horrified.

'You aren't going to tell me that you have been reading up art and philosophy so as to be able to keep up these conversations with me? Because that is actually what I have been doing and now I am beginning to feel it is all getting far beyond me.'

He roared with laughter, just like a boy.

'It is precisely what I *have* been doing. I just couldn't follow you any longer. You know, if one has to take someone in to dinner a whole winter through, one likes to talk about something that will interest her,' he said.

'Well, philosophy is all right, but it can be too much of a good thing,' I said. 'I would much rather hear something about your hobbies for a change.'

'I am in the happy position—that my hobby and my work are identical,' he said eagerly.

He told me then about his fight to raise the living standards of his soldiers. Most of them came from very primitive surroundings and could neither read nor write. The Indian barracks were clean and hygienically first class; so also was the morale. He seemed twenty years younger now that his duty-conversation had been abandoned.

After that evening we left the dinner table reluctantly and for the rest of the winter I looked forward to the dinners at the President's or at the Hyderabad Palace.

*

Every day we ourselves would have guests for breakfast, or for tea or dinner, and about once a fortnight we gave diplomatic

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dinners for about twenty-four guests. Occasionally we had a free Sunday, but by then so much work had been neglected and had to be dealt with that this day seemed even busier than the rest.

Before a dinner party I had to give up more than my usual two hours to housework. On those occasions I often worked with the staff from six in the morning till midnight. Nothing could be left to chance or allowed to go wrong and it had become almost a game with me to try and make such a diplomatic dinner as faultless as possible. One had to know all the pitfalls that could be encountered in India. For example, there must be reserve staff in case any of the servants or the chef should fall sick; the electricity might fail and both our refrigerator and stove were electrically run; the cream must not be sour nor the chickens full of tubercular germs. It was also important to know in advance what food the various guests could eat, since so many religions were represented in the Diplomatic Corps. Some were so orthodox they could not touch food with eggs in it, others could not eat bacon, and others could not eat beef. Chicken was therefore the most neutral meat, but I often had to have three different kinds of food so as not to conflict with any of the various religions. The Legation office investigated beforehand what kind of food each of the guests might eat, and the reasons were not always religious. Many people living in India suffer from liver complaints and are not allowed to eat food containing fat. Other illnesses added to the complications.

It took a very long time to set the table. The flower arrangements had to be simple but exquisite. Every curtain had to hang in its right folds, every *objet d'art* stand in the right position. The servants' uniforms had to be spotless, with all the buttons correctly done up. Before the dinner the hired servants had to be given their many instructions, and the order of precedence in serving had to be explained. If they were not told exactly what to do they would run around like a flock of sheep.

Jack was always instructed not to leave a drop of wine in the glasses when they were carried out to the kitchen. If this were not done a terrific din would soon be heard from those

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regions, with loud voices and the sound of breaking china. Any 'heel-taps' that reached the kitchen were consumed at once, and then the poor hostess would have to be prepared for the worst. A sauceboat or a glass of claret might be spilled all over an elegant evening dress. I was comparatively lucky, for only two evening dresses were ruined in our house as the result of 'heel-taps'.

Our first experience of below-stairs frolics was with the wife of our first butler, Ratja, who had been deputed to look after the cloakroom during a large dinner party. She danced in with the coats of the last guests across her arm. Giggling, she called out in her broken English:

'Hi, you, it is time for you to go home.'

One of the guests, a nice and very experienced hostess, whispered smilingly to me:

'Heel-taps'.

Both my husband and I were very distressed, but we had learnt our lesson. After that all half-empty glasses were poured out before they reached the kitchen.

But that was not the end of the story. Later the same night we were wakened by terrible screams from the servants' quarters. I rushed down and there I found the butler with a red-hot poker in his hand. He was running it up and down the arm of his wife, the one that had looked after the cloakroom, yelling at the top of his voice:

'I'll teach you not to bring shame upon the Master's house.'

The butler was as drunk as a lord and was swaying over her. He threatened me with the red-hot poker, too, when I tried to wrest it from him. A few seconds later I managed to push him into a corner, and then I had to try to pacify his terrified wife. We had to sack him, but it really was our own fault from our not knowing how dangerous these 'heel-taps' can be.

*

To start with I always made the mistake of going to the bazaars when I was marketing for our dinner parties—and for my general household shopping too, for that matter. My servants assured me that the prices were the same everywhere; and in

an expensive shop the customer also paid for the high rent, they told me. So I bought all my fruit wherever I thought I could get it cheapest. When, on one occasion, I happened to look into the back premises of one of these bazaars, I discovered in them large pails of dirty river water from the Jumna. The oranges were put into the water so that the porous skin would absorb it. The weight was thus increased, and at the same time the oranges looked cleaner and more appetizing. The servants told me the same thing was done in the large shops, and I investigated this and found that they were right, with the important difference, however, that in the large stores they used clean drinking water.

In one of the bazaars a dozen oranges would cost one rupee, whereas they would cost double in the big stores: a considerable difference in price, no doubt, but one had at least a greater chance of avoiding contamination. So far as bacon, ham and other foodstuffs were concerned I found it paid to shop in one of the State experimental shops, if not economically at any rate so far as hygiene and health were concerned. This also applied to flour, sugar, honey and butter.

One day I found the chef picking mice droppings out of the rice he was just putting on the stove. He assured me that better rice was not to be found in the whole of India. But he was wrong; in the more expensive shops the rice was better, and the mice and flies had no free entry to their store rooms as they did in the bazaars.

*

As I mentioned earlier, I enjoyed shopping in stores with no fixed prices much more. When things other than food were required I much preferred the bazaars. It was only from hygienic considerations that I was forced to buy every scrap of food in the best shops, for in India the problem of health becomes sooner or later a very important thing. Most new arrivals soon have appendix trouble, and the English often had the appendix removed before they came out. My appendix lasted a couple of years, but then it had to be eliminated.

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Very often the liver or the gall bladder go wrong too, and that can be very much worse.

Dysentery is a disease everyone living in India a couple of years or so seems to expect to have several times. It is a very unpleasant and exhausting illness which sucks away one's strength completely, and it is a long time before one feels well again. Influenza and throat infections are also unavoidable. Malaria and typhus are always lurking round the corner, and for many this is all a tremendous strain on their nerves; the British don't allow their diplomats to stay more than three years in India, for that is apparently the normal period of the body's natural resistance. If one stays beyond this time trouble is apt to begin. When the British were ruling the country the Government and the Diplomatic Corps always went to Simla, up in the hills, from the 1st of April to the 15th of October. Thus they virtually lived in a temperate climate all the year round.

In our case, owing to special circumstances, we stayed for more than three years and we were grateful for this. But we had to do what we could to reduce the risk of infections if we wanted to remain in India.

One of my friends in the Diplomatic Corps said to me one day:

'We are literally living with Death at our heels out here in India.'

For her personally it became a grim reality. Only a fortnight later she died from smallpox.

One year a horrid epidemic of jaundice had been scourging New Delhi. We boiled all our drinking water as usual, and if we went out we never touched water at all.

'How can you be bothered with all this fuss about boiling all the drinking water?' one of my friends enquired one day. Not long after that she fell seriously ill with jaundice.

*

We found the authorities were doing everything in their power to find the source of such epidemics. The value of getting all foodstuffs to the shops as clean and fresh as possible was being

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stressed everywhere. But the task was often too great and it was impossible to control every single shop, although the improvements that have already been achieved are admirable. In fact, during the seven years we lived there the change for the better was phenomenal. The standard of living was much higher, hygiene had improved, and the percentage of illnesses went down considerably.

I mentioned earlier in this chapter the problem of servants and 'heel-taps', and how we had to make sure the servants did not drink them. In the same way, we had to help them to be honest.

It is no good doing what one of my Scandinavian friends did. She let her head servant look after her money, clothes and jewellery and thought that he would be flattered by the great responsibility given him and therefore be quite honest. It was really too much to expect such standards in an Indian servant. They are not mature enough for it. They do want to be honest, I am certain, but one day they find themselves in financial difficulties and then they 'borrow' a bit. And in this way both servant and master tend to get involved in difficulties.

A Scandinavian who had trusted a servant blindly later had to see the fellow end up in jail. Imprisonment is the worst thing that can happen to an Indian. He will be finished for years to come. One must never forget to treat Indian servants as human beings, and like everyone else they like good things to eat and nice clothes. It doesn't make it easier when they see how carelessly we treat these things and how we take for granted all the things which for them are still the greatest luxuries.

However improbable it may sound, I am sure I know exactly where all my possessions are, what they cost and where I bought them.

The last time I returned from Europe I asked Jack:

'How do you like having this meddlesome memsahib of yours back again?'

'It isn't always easy to be under such strict control,' he replied, 'but we are becoming honest people and can hold our

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heads high. Madam sees everything and that makes it much easier for us to be honest.'

Some of the wives in the Diplomatic Corps get over these difficulties by keeping all their valuables in their private rooms. The servants are only allowed to clean there with the mistress present. Whenever the mistress is away the rooms are locked up.

Personally I found it much easier to have a list of everything written down whenever we went away for any length of time. Everything from handkerchiefs to jewellery was put down and signed for by the two head servants. I must admit it took some time to make out such a list. But it seemed the most satisfactory solution. It might be called tyranny, but both the servants and I came to prefer it that way.

One day some table napkins were missing when the laundry was returned. I found out that the dhobi had put the laundry up on his clothes line and then gone away for half an hour. In the meantime a thief had snatched anything he could lay his hand on in a hurry. In my opinion the dhobi was the guilty party, having exposed one of his fellow creatures to such temptations. So he was made to walk twelve times round the house and say:

'Dhobi never, never again leave Memsahib's clean, clean linen.'

Jack watched him carefully to be sure that he did every one of his twelve rounds.

One day the chauffeur took the car out without checking that it had enough oil. I heard immediately that there was something wrong. It was, of course, unforgivable of the chauffeur not to check the petrol, oil and the tyres whenever he took the car out. Unfortunately this was not the first time he had been careless in this respect, so something extra special had to be done about it. In my time in India I had seen enough of burned out diplomatic cars: they might look wonderful, but if one listened to the engine one soon got a shock. Our chauffeur had been a taxi driver and so he was accustomed to treat a car roughly. I had to make an example of him, so I deducted twenty-five rupees from his wages.

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But it did not impair our friendly relationship and a little later we gave him clothes to the value of twenty-five rupees. It had been a good lesson to him and we never had any trouble with our car after that.

To those who are willing, a lot can be learned from keeping house in India. But it is not always easy to learn. Certainly it wasn't in my case. During my first years in India I often wondered how it was possible still to have so many tears at my age. But everything sorted itself out in the end and now I can truly say I enjoyed working with my Indian servants.

Sanskrit

We were on our way to Benares one alarming day. As a learned Sanskrit expert from the West, my husband was to be the chief speaker at the degree ceremony at the Sanskrit University there.

I was very nervous about the whole thing. Not that I am lacking in confidence and admiration for my husband's genius for languages: he speaks seventeen and took a degree in Sanskrit over forty years ago, and he has continued to study it with a never-flagging interest. But it is one thing to be able to read and understand Sanskrit, and quite another to make colloquial use of it. It is supposed to be next to impossible for a European to speak it. Sanskrit has to be half-chanted and has many queer sounds which are totally unknown to us in the West. The most eminent of India's Sanskrit specialists were to be present. Learned pandits from all over the country were taking part in the festivities at which between 700-800 Indians were going to receive their doctors' degrees after years of study.

A feeble voice from the top bunk was chanting something in Sanskrit of which I understood absolutely nothing. I shuddered. There was Hugo, wide awake at two in the morning, practising his speech, and he had assured me that he was not nervous in the least.

'Don't you think you ought to sleep now,' I called up to him, 'so that you will be fresh tomorrow?'

I got no reply. But the Sanskrit chanting continued, and I began to perspire from sheer nervousness. One station after the other passed by. They were teeming with life even in the middle of the night. I heard merchandise being offered with shouts and screams above the din of the snake charmers' whistles. They carry their snakes on long poles with a kind

of weight on each end. The snakes lie in sacks rubbing against each other. I have never been able to enjoy these performances.

It was hot and close the following afternoon at the Sanskrit University in Benares. In front of us sat all the newly enrolled doctors and their relations. Altogether there must have been about 1,200 people in the hall. On the platform the Minister of the Interior was enthroned; next to him sat my poor Hugo, the chief speaker. I sat next to Hugo and on my other side was the Maharaja of Benares, who was going to take his doctor's degree in Sanskrit. Behind us sat all the learned members of the examination board. The most eminent among them wore orange headgear and scarves. Those still on the lower rungs of the ladder wore the same scarves but a different kind of yellow cap.

It was so quiet in the hall that one could have heard a pin drop. The Minister of the Interior had just spoken in Sanskrit about the proud traditions of the University. As I had a translation of the speech in my lap I could follow what he said. All this about the proud traditions made me even more nervous. The Minister of the Interior welcomed Hugo and he started his chanting. His brow was quite wet with perspiration. There was a deadly silence in the hall, a very rare thing in India. The vivacious Indians show their approval or disapproval loudly all the time during lectures. My hands were icy cold. Not a face in the hall moved. I gritted my teeth and prepared for the worst. If they tried to giggle at Hugo I certainly should deal with them. The thought of this cheered me. And before I knew where I was Hugo had finished. The students screamed and whistled, jumped up on the benches and waved to Hugo. Tears filled my eyes. Were they being abusive? Or was it enthusiasm? The young Maharaja bent over to me and whispered:

'You can look up quite safely now. It has been a real success. Congratulations.'

'What a relief. I was so afraid it would not come off.'

'How could you fear such a thing?' the Maharaja said with a warm smile. 'I have never before witnessed such spontaneous ovations to a guest from the students.'

Hugo was thanked and acclaimed on the platform. They all

wanted to press his hand and show their gratitude.

The following day something like thirty-two newspapers all over India wrote about his speech and quoted it in full. Mr Birla had several thousand copies of the speech printed and he distributed it in all the temples. It was a triumph.

‘Were you frightened?’ I asked Hugo when, soon afterwards, we went off to visit the Maharaja.

‘Was I frightened? That’s putting it mildly!’

The Maharaja of Benares lived in a magnificent palace by the Ganges. He was only about twenty-two years old and his hobby was collecting ancient manuscripts and beautiful ivory rugs. There is nothing like them in the world. They are made of thousands of tiny ivory rings tied together to make rugs. They were really worth seeing. Here we also saw some of the most wonderful ivory figures we had come across during our stay in India.

Immediately after tea there was a reception for pilgrims in the palace yard. The Maharaja gave an audience sitting on his throne, which was goldplated with magnificent carvings. Two other exalted persons were sitting beside him. We watched it all from the marble terrace. It was for all the world like something out of the Arabian Nights. We felt we were back in the glorious past of the Maharajas, when they were still the fathers of the people. The humming of the pilgrims reached up to us and it sounded like the murmur of a busy beehive. Every kind of costume was to be seen, some rich and colourful, but most of them drab and grey like India’s dusty fields, whence most of these people came.

A beautifully attired servant came up to us and announced that the elephants were ready. We were to start the ride which had been promised us. With the aid of ladders we climbed up on to the elephants’ backs, where we sat in something resembling an old-fashioned coach seat. And thus, carried by strong elephants, we rode comfortably round the Maharaja’s domain.

The journey continued to Kanpur, where Hugo was to lecture. A newspaper was brought into our compartment with a long article about my husband’s speech in Benares, which I read with great pride.

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Hugo was quite calm now. He had a large pile of newspapers before him, marking them with red ink. They were being sent on to New Delhi.

‘Do look at the country,’ I said excitedly. ‘How they struggle to haul the water out of the wells to water the sun-drenched fields. Everybody and everything seem thirsty here. If they had sufficient water here, these desert-like plains might be changed into flowering gardens.’

Hugo threw a fleeting glance out of the window.

‘I’m sorry, but I must try to get through my daily work, even if I am on a lecture trip. These are my office hours, so try not to disturb me for a bit.’

Rather crestfallen, I continued gazing out on this change from desert to cultivated fields. Everywhere the wells were the meeting-place for the villagers. Here news was exchanged and problems sometimes solved. We passed a flock of about twenty people harrowing the soil with small primitive picks before the sower was allowed to do his job. India has vast masses of workers, too few machines and practically no water.

We Scandinavians are fortunate in having no water problem. In India it is a daily problem. My thoughts wandered to Denmark. There it would still be winter and the woods would be smelling of wet earth and damp fog. Perhaps the first fragile flowers would have begun to show their heads above the snow. We often complain of lack of sunshine in Scandinavia. But here the sun scorches everybody and everything. All the same, the Indians seemed happier than the Scandinavians. What we call a necessary standard of living was to them an impossible luxury. They had so little to lose in India and consequently had far fewer anxieties than we Europeans.

I remember once spending a summer holiday on a farm in Denmark where I experienced a queer form of hunger strike because the workers had been given fried ham with onions three days running. Had they any idea of how opulent they really were, these farm workers who refused to touch their knives and forks at supper? It must be said in their favour that they had never had to consider food as a gift from on high, as it literally was in India.

At the railway station we were received by all the dignitaries of Kanpur and taken to Sir K. P. Singhani's guest house. Soldiers saluted us whenever we passed them. In the beautiful park round the palace a very impressive swimming-pool had been installed complete with artificial waves. As long as one did not look up one could imagine one was swimming in a very rough sea.

Sir K. P. Singhani had collected valuable *objets d'art* from all over the world. They were exhibited throughout the palace, which resembled a vast museum.

After dinner Hugo gave a lecture about Finland, and the following day he started a discussion on Sanskrit literature with a collection of very learned men. In the afternoon he was present at a meeting at the university, while I talked about the position of women in Finland to a large assembly of ladies. I like to talk about my own countrywomen, and I told them proudly that everyone could read and write, many talking one or more foreign languages, and that women took part in the political and social life. As a matter of fact, Indian women also do this.

Then the questions poured in.

Was it usual in present-day Finland to have more than one wife? Was the husband the supreme head of the household? Who brought up the children—the husband or the wife? Did the women take part in affairs of government? Was everybody allowed to marry? Did the parents decide whom their children should marry? Were there enough nurses? Were all marriages happy?

I told them about nurseries, about old people's homes and other social enterprises, and tried as best as I could not to discuss marriage. Who can say how happy marriages are?

The ladies were very interested in our churches, which they called temples. They asked if we believed in our gods, whether we prayed to them in our temples or at our house altars. I told them that Finland and Norway were the two countries in Scandinavia where the churches were most frequented. I avoided mentioning the position in Denmark and Sweden.

I spoke of Christmas and how crowded the churches were

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at that time. How we go out in the forest and find a pine tree which we decorate and set up in the drawing-room with a mass of candles. How all this is done in memory of Jesus, the son of God, who was born in a stable and slept in a manger nearly two thousand years ago. They were extremely interested to learn what qualities we attributed to God's son and how he protected us in our daily difficulties.

When the hour for questions was over, they told me it was a great pity I didn't live in Kanpur; there were so many things they wanted to know about our temples, our religion and our countries.

VIII

In the Himalayas

It was unendurably hot in New Delhi in the summer. It was not unusual for the thermometer to register 110 degrees in the shade. So it was natural for Europeans who were unaccustomed to such heat to go off to some cooler place. Many of the wives from the European colony went up to the Himalayas during this period. If one went high enough it was pleasantly cool, but to balance things Nature had other surprises in reserve which were not always so pleasant.

One especially hot summer the Swedish Minister's wife and I moved to a house about 9,000 feet up in the Himalayas. We had rented a large, gloomy-looking villa by the name of 'St Asaph'. My Swedish friend had the ground floor while I lived on the first floor, just under the roof, the lightning conductors and the weather gods.

Down in New Delhi, forty-five miles away, our husbands were busily engaged with their work, but they visited us every second weekend.

One evening, at about eight o'clock, my little silent servant had just finished the washing-up, carried in coal and wood, and made up a good fire in the open fireplace. He smiled at me in a friendly way and wished me good-night. I watched him disappearing in the direction of the servants' quarters, about 150 yards from the house. My Swedish friend's servants had also said good-night, so as to get indoors before darkness fell. There were black panthers roaming the neighbourhood. Only a couple of days before our neighbour's dog had been killed by one of these beasts of prey. When the people awoke in the morning the dog had disappeared. The servants were sent out to look for it and found its remains twenty yards from the front door.

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I was standing, looking at the ice and snow of Tibet, and at the purply-black mountains. Did I hear rumbling somewhere? I clutched the window-sill and did not dare to admit to myself how frightened I was to live here. We had rented the villa for the whole summer, so it was no good whining.

My bedroom was just above the room where my friend spent most of the time with her one-year-old daughter. We had agreed to this arrangement so we at least could hear each other if anything should happen. The only drawback was that we had to go outside to reach each other, and this we tried to avoid on account of the panthers. They only came out after sunset, but then tremendous plundering took place. There was a crack in the floor and I saw that the light was still on:

‘I think there is going to be thunder again tonight,’ I called down through the crack.

‘How frightful,’ a subdued voice came from downstairs. ‘It is the eighth night of this horrible din.’

‘It would be wonderful to have just one night’s decent sleep,’ I called down, trying to sound as calm and collected as I could.

I felt quite exhausted after all these frightful nightly storms, and decided to go to bed at once. I saw that I had matches, candles and a torch near by. The electricity invariably failed, as the lightning continually struck the wires. I had about finished my preparations for the night, except for pulling my bed out from the wall to prevent scorpions and other animals creeping into it while I was asleep. As I was about to move the bed I discovered that the servant had forgotten to fill with paraffin the cups in which the legs of the bed were standing. I realized that any kind of insect might now creep into my bed. My Swedish friend had killed no less than eleven scorpions in her nursery during the four weeks she had been there.

I shut my eyes. I was determined to sleep in spite of everything. But suddenly a tremendous flash pierced the darkness. The lightning had struck the lightning-conductor on the roof immediately above my head. It felt as if the whole house was swaying. Simultaneously came the bang; it sounded as if five

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million tins had been dropped at the same time on the mountain side. This was like a foretaste of hell. If one had to be punished for one's many sins through a long life, it certainly could not be done in a more ingenious way. Outside there were roving panthers and robbers, and above me the most hellish storm I had ever experienced. The thunderclaps crashed increasingly through the night and echoed in a hollow roll along the mountains. The lightning seemed to come from all directions—from above, from below and from the sides. Stiff with terror I sat up in bed and gazed at the drama. Should I switch on the electric light? Probably the current had gone. Then it happened. I had a feeling that the whole of the world was blowing up in one mass of sound: a giant hailstorm was drumming with phenomenal strength on the tin roof above me. I jumped out of bed in a sudden panic, upsetting a chair in the process and scattering matches, candles and torch all over the room. In the light of the next flash I could see one of those ghastly brown spiders on the ceiling just above my bed. It was as large as a child's hand. Strangely enough I became quite calm. At the sight of it everything had suddenly become so terrible that it could not be worse. There seemed to be room in me for no more fear, and I crept back to bed, prepared for anything.

A little later I noticed a gleam of light from below, through the crack in the floor. I tried my switch, and to my amazement it worked. The spider had disappeared from above my bed and the elements outside seemed to have quietened down a little. I staggered over to the crack in the floor and called down:

'How are you? Are you still alive?'

'Just about,' answered a miserable voice. 'I have got my baby in bed with me and am prepared for the worst.'

'It will soon be over, it is much calmer already,' I called down comfortingly without for a moment believing it. The storm passed as quickly as it had come. The moon appeared, and the snow mountains shone like fairy castles far away in the direction of Tibet. The thunder was rumbling on in the neighbouring valley, but it became fainter and fainter. But the house was still intact and we were all alive.

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The next morning we had breakfast together. We both looked equally jaded. One hundred degrees in New Delhi would have been paradise compared with the purgatory we had just been through.

The Swedish Minister was due that evening. He had three weeks holiday and his wife felt that as long as he was there she could stand the strain. If the worst came to the worst they would at least die together.

'All right,' I said. 'As soon as your husband arrives I will leave. My husband won't be here for another fortnight and I just can't stand this any longer.'

*

I packed my luggage and the servant went with me to Mussooree, about 3,000 feet down. Here we discovered that there was no bus to Dehra Dun, where I was to catch the evening train. The roads were blocked by landslides from the storm of the previous night. The only transport going down was some jeeps with soldiers on leave. The servant had left to get home before the panthers started their nightly ravages, and I was standing there alone with my suitcases. If I was to go it would have to be by one of the jeeps.

'I hope you can make room for me, because I simply must go,' I said ingratiatingly in my best Danish.

The soldiers were in high spirits and willingly made room for me and my suitcases. I am not likely to forget that drive. I have driven down the hairpin bends west of the Brenner Pass, where one can see the remains of cars in the abyss with their four wheels in the air. But that was child's play compared to the drive from Mussooree to Dehra Dun.

The soldiers were accustomed to these mountain routes and went down them at top speed. We drove along deep ravines where large pieces of rock were on the verge of tumbling on to the road. The soldiers kept up a ceaseless conversation. They obviously wanted to show off to the memsahib.

'An Indian soldier is never frightened,' one of them said in broken English, while the jeep raced downhill like a cannon ball.

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'Well, you can be quite sure that I am petrified,' I answered in Danish.

The jeep raced on. The soldiers were singing and enjoying themselves enormously. We drove like lightning through mud and across piles of rock. The jeep slid alternately with its front and back wheels on the edge of the precipice while I tried to look undisturbed. We took the hairpin bends on the wrong side of the road.

'No one else would like to drive after a storm like that,' the English-speaking one informed me.

'Just as well,' I thought.

Suddenly the jeep stopped dead. The soldiers had spades, and after a couple of hours digging we were able to continue our wild journey. A couple of hours are no delay in India. Whenever we came to a particularly frightful precipice the soldiers took great delight in driving along the very edge to give me a chance to enjoy the danger as fully as they did.

That afternoon I felt for the first time the shadow of old age closing in on me. I felt at least a hundred years older than those young lads, and I could not for the life of me find anything either exciting or amusing about that drive.

I would have liked to offer the Himalayas a sentimental goodbye. But now I only glanced back over my shoulder towards the mountains and thought that it would be a very long time before anybody got me up there again.

At last we were down. The jeep made a turn like a skier after a successful jump and we came to a halt in front of Dehra Dun railway station. I bade the soldiers goodbye and went in to get my ticket for the night journey through jungle and desert down to the baking oven of New Delhi.

'You must be prepared to share your compartment with several travellers,' the man at the ticket office told me.

'I would really rather not,' I said imploringly. After long transactions backwards and forwards I succeeded in getting a whole compartment to myself. The train was very long and there was plenty of room. I climbed into a first class Pullman. It looked really quite nice and I congratulated myself on my luck. My night's sleep was assured; I felt as if I had not slept

for years and I looked forward to getting into bed as quickly as possible. Carefully I fixed my bunk, undressed and looked forward to a quiet night's sleep, with the pleasant rhythmic sound of the wheels on the rails instead of hail and terrifying thunder claps. Then there was a knock on the door. I refused to answer it. This was my compartment. Through the din from the station I heard an imperious voice say in English:

'In the name of the Law open the door immediately.'

At the mention of the Law I immediately flung my dressing gown round me and opened the door.

A crowd of Sikhs, far-famed for their courage, milled into my compartment. They were fat and jovial and ready for anything. They threw down their sleeping bags on the bunks. There were four bunks in the compartment and no less than eight Sikhs.

'Out!' I shouted in Danish, clenching my fists.

They were highly amused at me and my strange language. The whole lot settled quietly down, produced their cooking utensils and put water on to boil. No one took the slightest notice of me.

'I will show them how civilised people behave,' I thought to myself. So I lifted up their luggage and started throwing it on to the platform. They stopped laughing. They got up and looked at me threateningly, but in the end they began to move. I pushed the one who was standing next to me, and out they went one by one. The last two departed meekly. Why? Perhaps because they had not tried to oppose me or perhaps because of some rule that a Sikh must not be touched by a strange woman. Rather excited but very pleased with myself, I returned to my bunk. What a mercy Hugo had not seen me during those few minutes. He had always impressed on me the necessity for a foreigner to show consideration to the natives of any country in every kind of situation. I was beginning to regret my behaviour and to feel sorry for those poor Sikhs. There was a knock on my lavatory door, it rushed open with a bang and two coolies fell into my compartment, each carrying a Flit spray. Smiling, they came over to my bed and lifted up the blankets beneath me. Soon there was a strong

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smell of Flit from the walls, the floor, the bed and the ceiling. The coolies departed as quickly as they had come. I jumped up to investigate and my suspicion was confirmed. The lavatory was also connected with the next compartment. So I locked its door firmly, surprised to find that it was possible to do so.

I then made a quick inspection of my compartment. The windows had shutters on the outside and some kind of Venetian blind affair on the inside which could be pushed up. The shutters were half open. Outside every window was a crowd of Indians peeping in through the slits of the blinds. I then began to go over all that had happened since I entered the Pullman. It might have been worse. All I had done was to throw out some Sikhs. But up in these jungles at the foot of the Himalayas you seem to be so completely outside the law that nothing mattered much.

Slowly the train began to move and soon we were crossing the jungle on our way towards the desert surrounding Delhi.

I was wakened suddenly by a constant knocking. What could it be? Nobody could possibly be knocking on the window or on the roof while we were rushing at full speed through the black night. I switched on the light. A pair of brown hands were pushing up the shutters from outside the window! The many gruesome stories my Indian masseuse had told me flashed through my head, of train robbers who made their way into the compartments of innocent travellers, preferably women, robbing them of all their jewellery and anything else they could lay their hands on. Now my turn had come. But they should pay for it dearly. Terror gave way to righteous anger. Luckily I had brought with me a heavy stick from the mountains and I began to slash at the brown hands who were clinging to the shutters. Some ugly screams pierced the darkness outside, and then everything was quiet. I heard no more screams nor saw any more brown hands, though I listened intently for a long time. Had I really knocked a human being off the train? I must be a devil in human form. Suppose it had not been robbers but just a poor Indian trying to steal a free trip?

I went to sleep once more but was soon awakened by a

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slashing noise and found that one of the shutters was being hacked to pieces. I got up again and hit the knife with all my strength. It was obviously someone who wanted at all costs to get into my compartment. Once more an uncanny scream rang out, but after that silence reigned once more. This time I did not go to bed again. Instead I tried to read Thomas à Kempis. But the words danced before my eyes.

At last I went to sleep again. I slept and slept and only awoke very drowsily when someone started hammering fiercely on my door.

‘Knock as much as you like,’ I thought. ‘No one shall get in here.’ Outside I heard people talking together. Then I heard an English voice:

‘Madam, would you please be so kind as to leave the train. It is about to be shunted on to another line. We arrived in Delhi long ago and have waited a whole hour for you to finish dressing.’

This happened in one of my early years in India. Naturally I made investigations and found out that it really had been robbers who had tried to enter my compartment that night. It eased my conscience considerably, although I have since realized my stupidity in travelling alone in a compartment. To do so in India is to invite trouble. It is putting temptation in a train-robber’s way.

The House where Gandhi Lived and Died

The Birla family is one of the richest in the world. I am told that they own something like seventy different companies in India. They have jute and sugar factories, tea plantations, coal mines, power stations, paper factories, transport businesses, insurance companies, banking enterprises, newspapers and even railways.

The family consists first and foremost of the ninety-four-year-old Rajah Baldevdas Birla and his wife, who is ninety-two. They live in a palace by the Ganges in Benares, and when they are about to die they will be carried down its broad stone steps and laid with their feet in the water of the Ganges to draw their last breath. It is the same for both rich and poor; to die with your feet in the water of the Ganges is regarded as the greatest possible happiness. All the years we were in India my husband and I were lucky enough to be invited regularly to the Birla House in New Delhi. We owed this to our friendship with the eldest of the four sons, J. K. Birla. He had withdrawn from business life to devote himself to meditation and an energetic study of Indian philosophy and Sanskrit, and it was these last two interests that he and my husband had in common.

Birla House is a comparatively modest affair, a low bungalow with about forty rooms, which is not many considering its owner's fabulous wealth.

We had almost the feeling of entering a church when we went to Birla's home for the first time. When we arrived we were offered iced fruit juice, as alcohol was not served at his home. We were the only guests, and for this we were grateful. It gave us more opportunity to talk to our charming host. He gave the impression of consistent simplicity. Not a superfluous

word. The questions and answers both came clearly and concisely.

Mr Birla had a surprisingly detailed knowledge of the Scandinavian countries. He knew all about Finland's part in the war and complimented us on Finland's economic recovery. He also knew about the model farms of Denmark, its well educated population and good social conditions. And he knew how Sweden had helped its neighbours and about the underground movements in Denmark and Norway. He seemed to know the names of all the great men of Scandinavia.

We were taken through one large room after another. Half of them were furnished in the European way, the others in the Indian style. Everything was simple and exquisite. There was a European dining room with heavy brocade curtains and heavy seven-branched silver candelabra standing on polished teak tables. The floor was covered with thick, soft velour carpets and along the walls glass cupboards were full of beautiful china. Then we entered an Indian drawing room with the largest divan I have ever seen. It must have been about eighteen feet long and twelve feet wide, and some forty people could sit on it and talk together. After that came the Indian dining room. If we had expected a luxurious dinner we would have been disappointed. There were a lot of small, round tables on the floor, each about two feet high. A small round bench encircled each table. It turned out to be the strangest meal I ever had in India and I am sure it was my husband's experience, too. I tried to sit down like a Yogi with my legs crossed on the bench. It looked all right, but it hurt so much that I had to let my feet drop to the floor in the ordinary European way. This helped, but new difficulties arose when my knees prevented me from getting close enough to the table to get hold of the utensils and the food. At last I placed myself sideways and that solved the problem.

In front of me on the low table was a large round silver tray with about a dozen dishes filled with the queerest bits of food: rice, fried cauliflower and some kind of yellow peas, with all kinds of extraordinary and unfamiliar ingredients. There was no meat, for Hinduism demands a completely vegetarian diet.

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I sat beside Mr Birla who, without a word, showed me how to eat. I followed his example very carefully in the real Indian fashion. One uses the fingers for most of the dishes. It all passed off surprisingly well. I did not even spill the soup, when I had to put it into my mouth with the aid of a piece of sticky flat bread, which had first to be shaped into a kind of funnel. If I had not by chance observed an amused gleam in the usually serious eyes of my host, I would have believed I knew how to eat like an Indian. I became self-conscious and seized a spoon near at hand.

‘No, please continue,’ Mr Birla said with a smile. ‘You are improving.’

Various gods stood before the low tables. There was Siva doing her timeless dance, bounded by the circle of the universe. This was about fifty inches tall and of solid gold like all the rest. The different gods round Siva came from Indonesia where emigrating Indians, 2,000 years ago, had introduced the Indian culture of those days. In the middle of this circle of statues the goddess Kali gazed at us with her jewelled eyes. All these ancient gods were surrounded by the most exquisite flowers. Indirect lighting enveloped it all in a dim, mysterious light. It was as if we were dining before the altars of the gods, and the meal itself seemed a kind of sacrifice in their honour.

I looked at our host and noticed his dignified and beautiful manners. He seemed so exalted and unassailable where he sat. It struck me for the first time in my life that the process of eating might really be made a thing of beauty.

After the meal we adjourned silently into the moonlit garden, crossing a bridge over a small river. A couple of tiny waterfalls made a melodious rhythmic sound with the quacking of the frogs, the song of the cicadas and thousands of other unknown insects. The peace that reigned there was difficult to associate with ordinary earthly life.

‘Where does this supernatural and wonderful peace come from?’ I asked Mr Birla.

He looked up at the sky and said:

‘Look at the stars of the universe. They seem to have become

at one with us here. Gandhi used to walk with us in this garden.'

He stopped and pointed:

'That is the spot where Gandhi was murdered.'

A young man suddenly stepped out from the shadow of the trees, and murmured:

'Yes, I was standing here only two yards away when he was killed. His last words were: "My God, my God . . ."'

I realized then how Gandhi's influence had become even stronger after his death than it was before. A simple stone had been erected to his memory on the spot where he had been shot. I was suddenly seized with a desire to kneel down and kiss it. But we Europeans do not do that kind of thing. Something in me rebelled: 'Why don't I do it when I feel like it?' And before my European logic had got the upper hand I knelt down and kissed the stone. Shocked, I looked up at Mr Birla and my husband, but they did not seem to notice. However, Mr Birla turned and picked some yellow flowers, which he gave me. Then he pointed, without saying a word, to the stone, and still under the strange spell of this place I put the flowers on it. And then we walked quietly back to the house. The young man we had met down in the garden had more to tell us.

'Up there was Gandhi's room. He always stayed here when he was in Delhi. Anybody could come here and listen to him. Here on these vast lawns they would come in the early hours of the morning to listen to what he had to say. I loved him and I was here with him for several months.'

'Who are you?' I ventured to ask.

'I am the gardener. But I can manage to get the flowers to grow just because he lived here. I still look after this garden where he once loved to wander. Sometimes he would stop beside me and say: "Brother, tell me how you manage to grow these beautiful flowers?" and I always answered: "Master, because of you".'

Our host went with us to our car and lifted his hands to his brow in farewell. As he stood there among the tall marble pillars on which these wise words from the *Bhagavad'gita* were

The House Where Gandhi Lived and Died

carved in Sanskrit, my belief in the future of India was still further strengthened:

When justice is in danger and evil is victorious,
I will appear, O Bharata.
I am born afresh every new era
To protect virtue, to conquer vice.
Thus justice is given a firm foundation.

The Sikhs

We were going far out into the country, so we drove off at sunrise. Delhi was about to awaken when we stopped at the Jumna bridge to fill up with petrol. We seemed to be the only people leaving the town, but we met a stream of vehicles driving into Delhi, which were mainly heavily loaded ox carts going into the city with their supplies of food. I was gazing out of the window and reflecting on the difference from when we had arrived seven years before. Then bazaars were allowed outside the shops and one had to force one's way through a slum to get into a big shop. With the horde of beggars reaching out their hands for bread it was something of an ordeal to go shopping in those days.

Our petrol tank was full for a long drive. It might not be possible to fill up again before returning. We took the road towards Meerut and Lahore. It was Kim's route, and it must have been very much the same in his time. Along the shores of the Jumna the dhobimen were squatting over their washing, and the whole wide beach seemed to be full of dirty clothes. No one boils his washing in India; it is well soaped, then beaten and rubbed against a rough stone, and if it is not clean the sun does the rest. This is so strong that after a couple of hours it had faded the worst dirt. Laundry from the Jumna is not so bad, but one must be prepared to be covered with sand when one puts on one's clean clothes.

The tarmac was full of pot-holes and the road was narrow; we had to make room incessantly for ox carts, camels, buffaloes and holy cows.

The buffaloes were sauntering phlegmatically in the sun; they looked sleepy, but are supposed to be very good for haulage, though this does not apply to the water buffaloes. If they

The Sikhs

see a hole with water anywhere near the road, they set off across ditches and stones with the ox carts behind them to get to the water. The driver has to get off before it is too late. Heaven help the driver who has gone to sleep on his load! Frequently one can see a desperate driver in the middle of the road wringing his hands, his cauliflowers strewn all over the road and the cart lying in the ditch, while the buffalo is standing unconcerned in the middle of the pond enjoying himself, up to his neck in water. It is, however, the donkey caravans which dominate the traffic on this road. A holy cow had settled down in the middle of the road; it was contentedly chewing its cud and all the traffic just had to circle it. A little further away a bus stopped and its passengers alighted to relieve themselves. They stood in a long row along the roadside, refusing to be disturbed by anyone.

It was strange to see this meeting of the centuries on the road. We who represented the modern age had to make way for the camels. Both the camels and their drivers seemed to enjoy the situation.

Four men and six donkeys were resting lazily by the roadside. The men were laughing and joking and their white teeth lit up their dark faces. What fun to see a man leading a buffalo with two small boys behind with sticks in their hands like their father. Their clothes, or rags, were also identical.

Buses of every colour were rushing past. The front part was labelled 'Upper class' in large letters, and the back part 'Lower class'. The front had also the sacred word *Aum* inscribed as an insurance against accidents.

Stray dogs were swarming everywhere. The strange thing about them was that their tails looked almost as fat as their bodies. They were hunting about in the refuse for scraps of food. Further on a buffalo and a holy cow were standing in the middle of the road with their horns entangled. They did not butt each other but only gazed viciously into each other's eyes. The traffic had to pass round them and even the conceited camels had to give way.

We drove far out into the country. A herd of scrawny pigs were rummaging in the refuse near a village of mud-huts. The

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rooks were tucking into any vermin they could find on their backs. A temple elephant, painted in stripes all over, was enjoying the morning sun; its trunk was swinging backwards and forwards, a sign that the elephant was enjoying life to the full.

Here, as on all the roads in India, we met holy men wandering along. They seemed to me rather too fat and well nourished. The poorer Indians venerate holy men and it is they who look after them and see that they thrive. I suspect that these well-fed specimens are more interested in the stew pot than in the soul. They put on a holy man's coat and then start on their wanderings to some religious festival. En route they get their food by begging and soon find how easy it is to satisfy their hunger. Thus they wander from one religious festival to another. I once gave one of them eight annas (about eightpence). He looked at me angrily and let me understand that he was no beggar, but a very holy, holy man. I told him that if he was as holy as he made out he surely could not take offence at such a small gift.

'Take care,' he said threateningly. 'I know how to curse as well as to bless.'

I improvised a few strange gestures in front of his face, and it had an immediate effect. He was completely taken aback and sneaked off. It is easy to frighten that kind of imposter with his own weapons.

Holy men are the spoilt pets of India, but they are also their problem children, but let me add that some of them are really worthy people, taking their religion very seriously. The really holy ones look emaciated, either because they belong to a sect which believes in fasting or because they are pondering so deeply about the inner meaning of life that they simply have no time to eat.

*

Eventually we arrived at our destination, a Sikh farm. The Sikhs are keen big game hunters, and our host and a few others had been out on a tiger hunt all the previous night. They had not bagged a tiger, but they had brought home a nice bag of game and a goat which had been hung up with crossed legs

The Sikhs

in the biggest tree on the farm. Unfortunately the vultures had already discovered it, and a small boy was now trying to keep them at bay with a long bamboo pole.

It was a strange farm: as far as the eye could see there was not a house in sight, only small huts of sticks and mud. The owners had let the farm to tenants and lived in Delhi, only coming down for an odd weekend now and again. They were solicitors to company directors and were comfortably off.

It was a lovely spot and I quite fell in love with it. It was run by a Danish woman who had married a Sikh, to the concern of the Scandinavian colony in Delhi. Very soon after their marriage something had happened which goes to prove that it is no good worrying about things one cannot understand.

The Danish woman had brought a small dog from Denmark and was very attached to it. She had to send it to the vet for a minor operation, but one fine day it became bored with being a patient and ran away from the hospital and lost its way. Weeks passed and the woman was beside herself with anxiety. The newspapers, contrary to their usual custom, inserted a notice about the dog, and she herself bicycled round the whole of Delhi looking for it. But all this was of no avail. The dog was nowhere to be found, which did not surprise anybody. Delhi has about a million inhabitants and there are thousands of stray dogs. Meanwhile her husband quietly pursued the matter on his own. A message was sent to all the Sikhs in Delhi, and hundreds of sharp, alert Sikh eyes began to look for the little black dog. Then one day a Sikh happened to be repairing his bicycle by the Jumna bridge, and suddenly he saw a small black dog and a bedraggled beggar stretched peacefully out in the sunshine. He called the dog (every Sikh knew its name was 'Troll'). It started up and rushed over to him. The beggar who had looked after 'Troll' very well and shared his miserable meals with him was given a handsome reward for all he had done. Great was the joy when little 'Troll' was brought home to its rightful owner.

*

The Danish woman and her husband took us by jeep along the

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delta of the Ganges. We drove through water and sand, rushes and sugar beet. I have never before seen so vast a landscape.

'This is as good as any sanatorium,' I said, taking a deep breath.

Our hostess answered by making a few dance steps across the sand.

'Good gracious, you must be a ballet dancer,' I exclaimed.

'So I am,' she said. 'I used to dance solos at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen.'

The wind was sighing in the sugar beet and the rushes. When I shut my eyes I might be back in the fir plantation at home in West Jutland. I had missed this sound all my years in India.

Some people came wading across the river—a man and wife and five children: 'Adab-arez, Adab-arez,' they greeted us. 'We are showing you our respect.' It was the first time I heard this well-known Sikh greeting: 'Wahi Guru Ti Ka Khalsa — Kahi Guru Ti Ka Fatch.' (Meaning: 'The Sikhs belong to God, the victory is God's'.)

The phrase is as old as the Sikhs themselves. Originally it was a war cry. Now it is a peaceful daily greeting among them.

There were miles upon miles of sugar beet and spring wheat, all apparently flourishing despite the poor quality of the soil. The sugar beet is planted in April but is not harvested before December. We watched the farm labourers busy breaking the beet with their hands. As far as the eye could see there was not a building. I had forgotten that the majority of them sleep in the open air; rolling themselves up in their tattered rags, they lie down in the fields.

Some of the work-people came over to the jeep with some appetizing pieces that they wanted us to taste. They were tough, but delicious when one sucked them. Out here they can get about 10 lbs of sugar from about 100 lbs of beet.

We also saw the places where the tigers feed. Scattered about were the skeletons of bulls and other large beasts. A short distance away were the remains of an animal that had been recently killed, and the vultures circled round the carcass, keeping their eyes on it the whole time. An experienced big game hunter can always tell whether it is a male or female tiger that has

The Sikhs

done the killing. The female tiger invariably bites off the tail first without eating it, putting it tidily on one side. The male never touches the tail at all. No one could tell me the reason for this.

We were shown fresh pug marks of tigers and we were told that a tiger is more frightened of man than is generally supposed. The marks were much larger than I had imagined. They were shaped like dinner plates with dents in them.

When we returned to the farm, supper was ready. One of the Sikhs had produced it with the help of a native cook. We washed in a well outside the mud hut. A servant stood by the pump and poured water over our hands, which we rubbed thoroughly with soap. With a shudder I remembered having touched the antlers of a dead animal lying by the Ganges.

The kitchen consisted of two walls made of plaited rushes. Here the cook was sitting by a small clay fireplace. He was making chapati, a kind of pancake, which was spluttering in the sizzling fat, while he prodded it with a stick. The food was grey with dirt; the cook could not be expected to go out to the pump to wash his hands every time he put fresh fuel in the stove. He was burning sugar-beet roots, which have to be constantly replenished to keep the fire going. A little extra dirt made little difference here. The thousands of flies which covered the walls were infinitely worse.

Nevertheless, the food was delicious. There were tempting looking onions and fried goats' liver, no doubt the one that had been shot the night before. I stuck to chapati and rice. We ate with our fingers and there were no plates, so the washing-up was very simple. We all helped ourselves to what we wanted from the large dish. Afterwards the cook scrubbed the copper dishes with wet clay; they were then rinsed under running water and dried in the sun. It was a primitive but effective method. The sun disinfects everything in India.

We had left New Delhi at sunrise, and we returned in time to enjoy the wonderful play of colours of the setting sun. Along the road were the blue-black silhouettes of the trees. The dust from the dry roads found its way into our lungs, eyes and ears. I have never been able to get accustomed to the terrible

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dust everywhere in India. A young Sikh, to whom we were giving a lift, suddenly said to me:

‘Do you know what I missed most in the United States when I was there studying on a scholarship?—this wonderful Indian dust!’

The Journey To Shangri-La

Over the Himalayas to Nepal

The morning sun was shining brightly on the silver wings of the large Bharat Airways plane in which we took off from Willington Airport. We were on our way to the fairy tale country—which only a few Europeans had then been allowed to enter. This was 1951, and I was told that only about three or four hundred Europeans and Americans had ever received permission to set foot in Nepal. We had been invited there by the Maharaja, and as it happened we were his last guests before a revolution forced him to leave Nepal.

The first part of our flight took us to Patna in Bihar, where we had been invited to stay as the guests of the Governor before our hop to Nepal. It was a unique and beautiful trip. The sun had just risen and threw its golden light over the green rice fields and the red earth deep below us. For a long way we followed the River Jumna as it wriggled like a fat grey boa-constrictor through the gay countryside. Up there in the air I understood suddenly why the rivers of India are holy. Water is so rare in this dry climate that it is literally a gift from the gods.

The town of Patna, where we were spending the night, has about 500,000 inhabitants and lies on the shores of the Ganges in the Bihar State, which was one of the richest in India. There were no huts of cowdung, stone and clay here. Everything looked nice and well-kept. The houses were whitewashed with roofs of red tile. In spite of the apparent prosperity a famine was prevalent at that time, for there had been no monsoon at all. Unfortunately, famine is quite possible however rich the State.

Captain A. L. Khan, the Governor's aide, met us at the airport. In the luxury of Bihar's number one car we were driven

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straight to the palace, which lies in a large park at the end of a straight avenue. Two rows of soldiers were at the entrance; they clicked their heels and presented arms. My husband was accustomed to such honours. With great *savoir faire* he smiled, lifted his hand to his brow and bowed in all directions.

A double row of servants were drawn up to receive us within the palace. They looked most picturesque in their long-coated uniforms with wide scarlet sashes round their waists. Their breasts glittered with embroidered suns, each with a large B in the middle to show that they belonged to the State of Bihar. We were taken up the wide marble staircase to our rooms, where we found a marble bathroom almost as big as our biggest drawing-room at home.

Jack was to follow us with our luggage, so some small suitcases were all we had for the flight. In all this vastness they looked quite lost. There was a knock on the door and a servant entered with fruit juices on a silver salver; he had also brought a basket of fruit.

'May I have Madam's keys?' he said, stretching out his hand for them.

'Keys?' I said, quite bewildered.

'Doesn't Madam want me to unpack?'

In my mind I reviewed what there was to unpack, and I answered, stupidly:

'No, our luggage is at the airport. We are continuing to Nepal tomorrow morning.'

'Your keys, please,' the servant persisted.

Well, there seemed nothing for it but to obey orders. He had obviously been given strict instructions.

I thought I had better tell him once more about the luggage at the airport in case he had not understood what I had just said.

'We have all our luggage at the airport, as we are continuing to Nepal early tomorrow morning,' I repeated.

He looked politely at me, without the flicker of an eyelid. He was not impressed, though all he said was:

'Lunch is at one o'clock, Madam.'

Over the Himalayas to Nepal

He shut the door quietly as he left, murmuring that he was 'Madam's private servant.'

A moment later I walked to the door, which opened before I had time to touch the handle. The servant was standing outside—watching, ready to open and shut the door to save me the trouble.

'The Master's room,' I said with all the dignity I could muster, but I could hear that my voice was far too meek. I walked down the long, magnificent corridor with my elegant servant at my heels. I straightened my back. When I feel nervous I am inclined to stoop, which is not becoming at all.

My husband was in morning clothes and looked very elegant. Downstairs a large party was gathered in an immense reception room, with the Governor as its natural centre. Most of the guests seemed to be there in our honour, and there were a number of Ministers of State with their wives in saris. I was beginning to feel more at home. They were all extremely pleasant and the Governor made interested enquiries about Finland, which he told us with pride he had studied thoroughly. It turned out that he knew a great deal about the whole of Scandinavia.

Before lunch he dipped his hand in a large silver dish and sprinkled it over the food.

'Do I do that too?' I asked tentatively.

'Yes,' he said. 'If you want your meal to be blessed and cleansed, do as I do.'

I tried to imitate his performance, and he seemed satisfied.

The meal was completely vegetarian. There were quantities of highly spiced dishes with boiled rice, followed by a kind of yoghurt and every kind of fruit and sweetmeats. Suddenly the door was thrown open and a doctor appeared with a bag, which he placed on the table between the Governor and myself and opened. A horrid smell of antiseptic spread over the table. Quite unconcerned, the doctor fished out a needle from his bag, disinfected it while the Governor rolled up his sleeve, and gave him an injection. All kinds of surmises raced through my head. What had happened? Was it a cholera or typhus epidemic? If so, I presumed that I would be the next in turn

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for the needle and I remembered with embarrassment that my sleeves were far too tight. I prepared for the worst, although the rest of the guests seemed quite unconcerned. The doctor packed his bag and left.

'I'm sorry about that,' the Governor said with an apologetic smile. 'I suffer from diabetes and have to have an injection during my meal.' I heaved a sigh of relief.

An hour later I was lying on my bed, gazing up at the beautiful ceiling. My husband had told me that everything in the palace was unchanged since the British were there. The furniture was the same as well as the traditions. Only the food had become completely Indian. What a wonderful life the English must have had amidst all that beauty and splendour. I dozed off, but was abruptly awakened by my servant standing beside the bed with a large silver tray with tea and cakes.

'Where would Madam like her tea served?' he inquired with deference. Behind him I suddenly saw our Jack.

'Jack!' I called out joyfully. 'When did you arrive?'

'Madam must forgive me, but the train was two hours late, which made it impossible for me to be here and help Madam with the unpacking,' he replied.

'I had scarcely anything to unpack,' I replied.

'You can leave, we won't require your assistance,' Jack said to the servant, adding authoritatively: 'Just leave the tray on the table. I will serve tea for my Memsahib.'

The servant did not turn a hair, but bowed deeply and disappeared.

'But, Jack, you can't order these servants about like that,' I said.

'Oh, yes, Madam,' he replied proudly. 'I have been here an hour already and have told them all about Master and Madam.'

'What have you told them about us?'

'That you are very, very rich and very grand. That Master and Madam are from Europe and the richest that have ever visited India.'

'Are you mad, Jack? You really must not tell such tales,' I said, with real horror in my voice.

'It is necessary, Madam, otherwise they will not respect the

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Master and Madam. They expect me to tell something. And Madam must not blame me for telling it in my own way. Besides, I also become a grander servant when the Master and Madam are so very wealthy.'

The next morning Jack came with us in the plane. It was his first flight and he buckled the strap so tight round his waist that he looked as if he might break off in the middle. When we undid our belts he evidently could not undo his. I went over to him. He tried to stand up but was, of course, unable to do so.

'Please excuse me, Madam, I can't get up. I really don't know how to undo it,' he said miserably.

I helped him with his belt, and told him to look out of the window throughout the flight and he would forget to be frightened. But it was impossible, and his brown face looked grey with terror.

'I am glad it was you who came with us in the plane, Jack. You are the bravest servant I have ever had,' I told him, and this appeared to help a bit.

He seemed relieved and grinned broadly.

'Well, if Madam thinks I am brave, then I thank her a thousand times.'

The majority of our fellow passengers were Tibetans with a few Nepalese. I had no idea such extraordinary people existed. The Tibetans, who were no doubt very exalted, were dressed in coats reaching to the floor. Round their waists they wore wide, highly-coloured silk sashes, and their long boots had the woollen tops embroidered with all kinds of queer signs and lettering. On their heads they wore pointed hats with fur brims and broad gold bands. But their faces were their strangest aspect, for they looked as if they came from another planet. Their wide Mongolian faces were tanned by the sun and wind and hundreds of minute wrinkles gave them a shrunken appearance. They looked fierce and unapproachable. I felt no desire whatever to talk to them, though I generally enjoy talking with my fellow passengers.

It was easier to place the few Nepalese who were travelling in the plane. They were obviously terrified of flying; their

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frank, open faces betrayed them. But they smiled whenever the plane bumped in and out of an airpocket, although they all suffered badly from air-sickness. I wondered how the Tibetans would behave when they were in the grip of air-sickness, but their self-discipline seemed tremendous.

The Himalayas were now a blue-black wall in front of us. Was I frightened? Before I had time to analyse my feelings, my husband called out to me through the noise made by the motor: 'Are you feeling sick? You look rather pale.'

'No, I feel all right, except for the mountains in front of us and these peculiar Tibetans. I am sure they would not change their expressions even if we crashed.'

'So you *are* a bit frightened!' he said. 'But you know there is no need to be. We will skim these tops with the greatest of ease. Our number isn't up yet.'

We were now flying at about 16,000 feet, and the air in the plane was foul. There was extra oxygen supply but it was still difficult to breathe.

The clouds deep under us were glowing in the strangest opal colours. The mountain tops peeped out of the cotton wool ocean, blue-black and sharp as if they had been cut out with razor blades. Further down the snow and the ice shone in the queerest colours and shapes, while lower still lay the clouds. The fantastic formations of ice and snow cannot be described. I tried to compare them with towers and peaks, houses, faces, hands and feet, but it was no good. Comparisons with familiar things paled beside these strange objects, which the human mind could not take in. I felt lifted out of my own world into a totally different one. Few Europeans had flown this way before, and I tried to brace myself with the thought that in a way we were pioneers. But I was not successful in evoking the feelings that usually accompany such moments. It was as if I myself no longer existed; the world had come to life and showed its real face and there seemed to be no room for me any longer. Suddenly the clouds disappeared from beneath us. Far below lay one Shangri-la after the other. They shone like jade jewels in the sun. We went lower and soon seemed to be turning in and out among the sharp mountain peaks. At last



5. 'Gamle Praestegaard', our summer home on the Isle of Funen in Denmark . . .



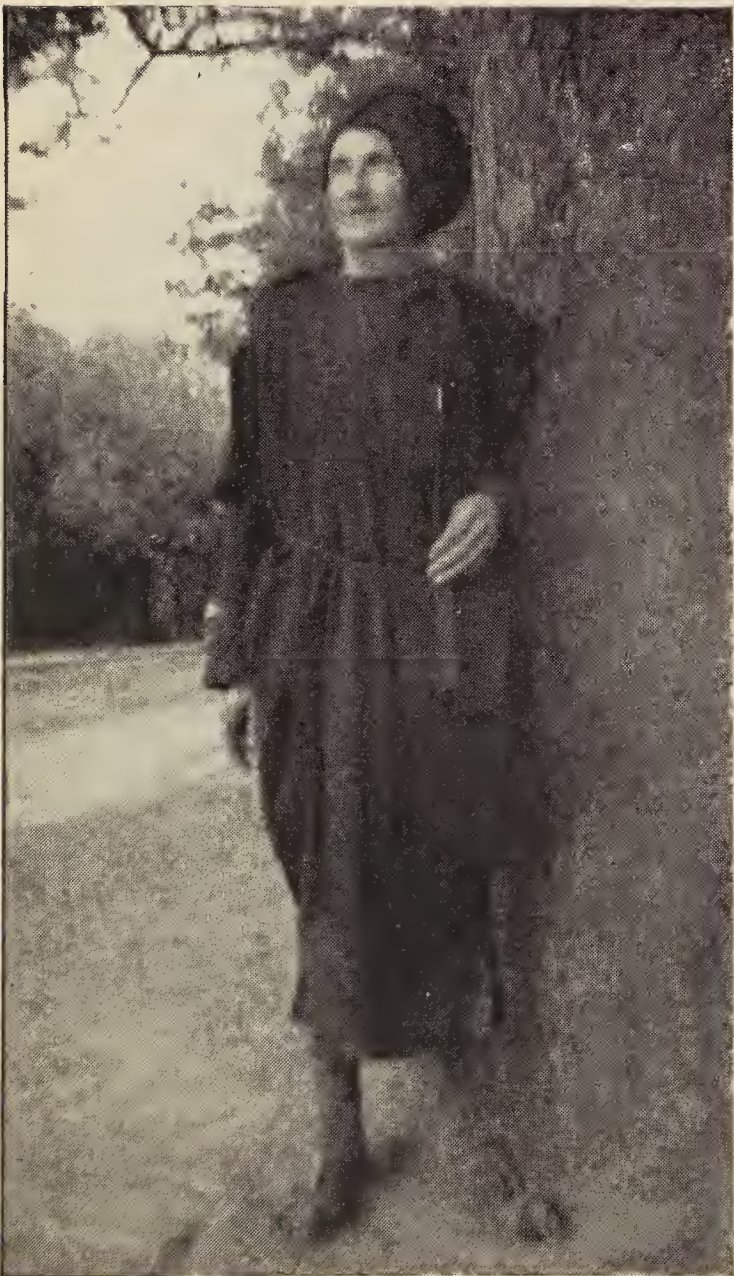
. . . and the residence in New Delhi seen from the garden.



6. *Left:* A holy man at the Kumbhamela festival. (*Rangoon Studios*)

Below, left: Alfred Sörensen—a Danish gardener who became an Indian Sadhu and lived with the holy men in the Himalayas for 22 years.

Below, right: A Norwegian friend, Mrs. Sigrun Berg, with a holy man who visited us in New Delhi.



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we got below the snow-level and the trees began to appear on the mountain side. With a mixture of relief and disappointment I found we had left the mountains behind, only to discover later that this was only the first range. Another blue-black range approached us with terrific speed. I had not yet regained my wits after the jump over the first giant, and everything happened too fast for the brain to react properly.

'If you look out to the right you will see Mount Everest,' the loudspeaker announced. We did not manage at first to catch sight of it, for the plane was throwing itself about like a wounded animal, but there was another announcement and there was Mount Everest glittering in the afternoon sun. We could see it clearly now—an enormous and impressive sight. It stood before us, supernatural and untouched.

The plane shook a great deal as we began to descend. I felt as if my ear drums would burst, but I opened my mouth wide again and again and swallowed hard and thrust a finger in each ear. At last we were flying over the most beautiful plains I have ever seen and then over a town which looked as if it consisted of nothing but temples. This was Khatmandu, the capital of Nepal. We landed with a few soft bumps. The doors were opened. We had arrived.

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There were no buildings at the Khatmandu airport; nothing but tents. The air was filled with a blended scent of flowers and ice-crystals. A holy man received us as we stepped out of our plane: he wore a golden robe, which seemed to shine almost as brightly as the sun, and he had an enormous number of praying garlands round his neck. He had a noble head and big unfathomable eyes. He gave us a friendly smile and then beckoned us to follow him to the Maharaja's car, where the chef de protocol awaited us. But before he had time to welcome us the holy man addressed us in a soft, strange language, each word sounding like a blessing. Putting our folded hands to our brows, in the way we had learnt in India, we returned his greeting solemnly. Then the holy man stepped back, and the chef de protocol shook hands with us with a smile, as a European would, and helped us into the waiting car.

At the Maharaja's guest house we were received by a squadron of Ghurkas in khaki, with broad-brimmed hats and with large knives in their belts. They presented arms and clicked their heels with great gusto.

Inside the magnificent entrance hall the Maharaja's servants were lined up in a row, and there to my great relief I discovered all our luggage. The size of our luggage had obviously impressed the servants, and I thought I even detected a heightened respect for us in the extra deep bow of the chef de protocol.

*

The Maharaja's guest house was like a first class European hotel and everything was in the European style except the fantastic size of our rooms; the grandest hotel in Europe could not have

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afforded to give so many square yards to its most exalted guests. The floors were of marble, the walls were covered with gilt-embossed green leather and the furniture was all upholstered in silver brocade. I was surprised to find among all this splendour an ashtray advertising a well-known brand of whisky. The bed was a magnificent affair, though in spite of its softness I did not sleep much the first night I spent in it, for the springs seemed to groan reproachfully under my weight the whole night long. Towards morning I swore that, however delicious the meals in this place might be, I would start slimming the next day.

I had hardly made this resolution before the doors opened wide with a great bang and in marched two men-servants in splendid green uniforms, covered with gilt embroidery. They were wearing peaked Tibetan caps and long black riding boots, and between them they carried a huge silver dish, about two yards long. On it lay the most delicious-looking trout I have ever seen.

'His Highness the Maharaja's morning gift,' one of the servants chanted.

I thanked them in my best English, whereupon they handed the dish to Jack, who had followed upon the heels of the green-liveried servants in such a hurry that his uniform was only half-buttoned and his turban askew over one eye. The green men clicked their heels and strutted out, like storks in the marshes on a spring morning. Almost as soon as Jack had disposed of the silver salver the doors opened once more with a bang, and the two green men returned, this time carrying a large basket of fruit between them.

'From His Highness the Maharaja,' one of them chanted again. This time I had the presence of mind to say: 'Dhanyabad,' which is the Nepalese for 'Thank you'. I had been instructed beforehand by Jack in the most useful Nepalese phrases. Without flickering an eyelid the green men clicked their heels once more and strutted out as before. Even Jack seemed impressed at last. 'This would be enough for both lunch and dinner,' he said, 'and you have to be present at breakfast at eight o'clock as well.'

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Looking out of my window, I discovered to my amazement a whole battalion of Ghurkas. They went on drilling, presenting arms and clicking their heels with great solemnity all morning. Three of them swaggered down through the lines, saluting to both sides. I asked Jack why all these soldiers were outside our windows.

'They are our own private Ghurkas,' Jack informed me with a proud grin.

'Our own? What do you mean?'

'Oh, they are there to protect His Excellency and Madam. They will be on duty day and night as long as we are here.'

A sumptuous breakfast table, loaded with every possible variety of known and unknown dish and fruit, awaited us. I felt dreadfully hungry and I am afraid I had helped myself to a plateful before I remembered my resolution to slim. My husband and I sat at opposite ends of the table, which was so long that we could not address a remark to each other without shouting.

*

As we were not due at the Maharaja's until one o'clock, Maria, Hugo's daughter, and I decided to go sightseeing on our own after breakfast. We put on our best European clothes and thought we looked quite passable. But, alas, we were wrong. We suddenly found ourselves the centre of such a dense crowd that we could hardly move. They were all giggling, although obviously trying hard to take us seriously. In the end they were all shaking with laughter. They had never realized that such creatures existed. We had been walking along with our legs for everyone to see, as our skirts only reached just below our knees. Unfortunately we both had rather hefty legs, though we tried to persuade ourselves that they were not really fat. But we were no longer so sure. Everybody's eyes were rivetted on our legs, which seemed to be the chief cause of their merriment. Compared to these scraggy, emaciated Nepalese we felt like the giant women in circuses.

Soon we could move neither backwards nor forwards and we began to get alarmed. They were beginning to touch us and

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pinch our arms gently. A woman knelt down to measure my legs with her thin little hands, and she lifted her emaciated arms with amazement and shook with laughter. We weren't stuffed! We were really as fat as that!

At this point some Ghurkas suddenly appeared on the scene and began to scatter the crowd. With signs and gestures they did their best to make us understand that we had better return. Repeatedly they shouted threateningly the word 'Maharaja' to the crowd. There was no ill-feeling towards us in the crowd; it was simply that they found us so hilariously funny. There was nothing for it but to make a hasty retreat, but every time we stopped the crowd assembled again and we were followed all the way by a long trail of natives. It was a disappointment; we had looked forward to a few shopping expeditions without the 'protocol' at our heels.

When Maria and I returned we found that our little private excursion had already been reported to the chef de protocol.

'Why did you not let me know that you wished to do some sightseeing this morning?' he asked ingratiatingly. 'I should have felt greatly honoured to take you about in the Maharaja's car.'

'We did not want to inconvenience your Excellency so early in the morning, and besides, we greatly enjoyed our little walk,' I answered, just as ingratiatingly. The exalted gentleman looked rather put out at my reply. I was determined we should see all we wanted and in our own way without the chef de protocol being always about or getting a chance to criticise our behaviour. I was going to use the same weapons as he.

*

The Maharaja's palace stood in splendid isolation, surrounded by a vast park. Outside the palace entrance more solemn Ghurkas presented arms. Suddenly I realized the significance of the three Ghurkhas who had been strutting up and down in front of my window, saluting the rest. They had been pretending to be us arriving. Once more Hugo marched in front with the chef de protocol. The wide marble steps seemed to go on and on

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for ever. On each step a magnificent Ghurka stood with a fixed bayonet.

At the top of the steps we were received by the Maharaja's two sons. They were old friends from New Delhi. The Maharaja himself followed just behind them. He was an awe-inspiring person, but he smiled as he shook our hands warmly and said:

'I feel proud to welcome countrymen of Marshal Mannerheim. He visited me privately some years ago and I found him a worthy representative of his country.

'I know so much about your country,' the Maharaja continued, 'and when my brother—our ambassador to India—conveyed to me his wish that you should see our country and visit me, I told him immediately that it would be a great pleasure receiving countrymen of my friend Mannerheim.'

The Maharaja spoke excellent English and we were soon engaged in a lively conversation about Finland.

'I would very much like to see your beautiful country before I die,' he said wistfully, 'the country where the sun never sets. For it is really a fact, isn't it, that it does not set for several months in the year?'

'Yes, indeed it is,' I said, 'and it is certainly the most beautiful thing Finland can show a foreigner. It is an experience no one ever forgets.'

The Maharaja sighed. 'Well, it has been our choice to live in this isolated country of ours and that is why we have seen so little of the great world. Now that I am getting old, I regret it very much.'

The Maharani entered; she looked enchanting in a pale green sari with a wide gold border of embroidered suns. She was wearing a huge gold brooch like a sun, and rows upon rows of pearls and precious stones round her neck; her wrists were covered with many golden bracelets and she wore gold brocade slippers. She was accompanied by her daughter.

The Maharani also greeted us in the European way. Her hands seemed almost unreal to the touch; they were soft and fragile like the petals of flowers. She was no longer young,

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though still good-looking, and she must once have been remarkably beautiful.

It was a select party of the Maharaja's relations and Ministers who sat down to luncheon with us, but the Maharaja and the Maharani remained standing. To our surprise they took the dishes from the footmen and started to serve us as if we were their children. This is a beautiful old Nepalese custom that is extended to honoured guests on their first visit.

The Maharani waited on Hugo and Maria, and the Maharaja attended to me. I began to wish I had not had such a delicious breakfast, as I realized I was expected to taste every one of the wonderful things that were heaped on my plate. I felt I must not refuse a thing, as I was being waited on by the Maharaja himself. But at last I had to give up; I just could not swallow another thing. No sooner had I finished one helping than double the amount was put on my plate by my polite host.

Fortunately the Maharani, sensing my predicament, came to my rescue, and my plate was immediately removed by a footman.

At last I had a chance to look at my surroundings. The banqueting hall in which we were sitting had the largest crystal chandeliers I have ever seen. On the table enormous silver candelabras towered over endless exquisite dishes, at which I did not dare to look. When at last we rose from the table, or rather, had the gilt leather chairs pulled away from us, I know I was several pounds heavier.

The Maharani and her daughter, who acted as interpreter, came over to me and we adjourned to a near-by salon to talk. The Maharani enquired with the keenest interest about everything in Finland and what it was like being a woman in my country. Did the men ill-treat their wives in Finland?

I felt slightly embarrassed at having to answer such questions. I told her warily that there were some men in our country who ill-treated their wives, but that, thanks to our strict laws, real violence was very rare.

'Tell me what happens to a woman who is unfaithful to her husband in your country?' she continued eagerly. In Nepal in

former days an unfaithful wife would have had her nose cut off.

I gazed in front of me for a second. It was obvious that I had to reply in a way that would be acceptable to her way of thinking.

‘We have laws about that, too,’ I murmured.

‘Do your Maharaja and your Maharani treat their people as if they were their children?’

I assured her that they did.

‘Tell me something about the Maharaja and the Maharani of your country,’ she asked. ‘What do they look like? Are they like us?’

‘I wouldn’t say so. But just as your Highness is like a mother to the Nepalese people, so is our Maharani Paasikivi to the Finnish people.’

‘How many wives has your Maharaja got?’ she asked eagerly. ‘Has he got a great many?’

‘Our Maharaja is a remarkably exclusive man,’ I replied cautiously, ‘and he will only have one wife at a time. He evidently feels that this suits him best.’

‘How many of his wives have died? I hardly suppose he lets them get very old,’ she interrupted.

‘Well, you see, here again our Maharaja is rather a unique person. When his first wife died, he did not marry again for some years.’

‘And then I suppose he chose someone about twelve or fourteen years old?’ the Maharani interjected quickly.

‘No. Our Maharaja is a great admirer of intellectual maturity, and he likes to surround himself with women of the same intellectual level as himself. He can even discuss politics with women. He is a firm believer in women taking part in politics.’

‘He must be an extremely progressive Maharaja,’ she sighed.

I sighed too, relieved that the conversation seemed about to take another turn. But, alas, we were not finished yet. The Maharani asked me discreetly whether I was the favourite wife, since I was accompanying my husband on such an exalted visit. I assured her that I *was* the favourite wife.

‘So am I,’ she said quietly.

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'I am sure that your Highness will always keep the first place in the Maharaja's heart,' I said impulsively.

'Yes,' she whispered, 'he always returns to me. We can talk together in just the same way as you tell me your Maharaja can talk to his Maharani; and then there are our children. They are his children and mine and I love them above all else on this earth. They are good, loving children.'

'I am sure your Highness is a wonderful mother! How I wish I was your daughter and could live in this beautiful country of yours.'

'Yes, it is beautiful and it is my home . . .' she whispered, 'but how long, I wonder, shall I be allowed to call it my home?' Three weeks later she was exiled for ever from her home and her country.

She seized my hand and said: 'You have a heart and it makes me happy to have had this talk with you. Never before have I been able to talk so freely to a woman from another country. Can one really talk and exchange ideas as easily as this with other women from your country?'

'Yes, I nodded, 'one can, if one only looks into their hearts for the love they hide from themselves and others.'

'That is it,' she said, with another sigh. 'If only we could show what is in our hearts instead of the superficial glamour of our possessions which are nothing but illusions.'

I parted from the Maharani of Nepal with a feeling of deep sympathy. She was one of the most charming women I have ever met.

They were Laughing with Happiness

Every day in Nepal seemed to be a fête day for the population. The Nepalese are always laughing and life to them seems to be one great joke.

I am told that the Ghurkas, who come from Nepal, are the best soldiers in the world. We were told that even in the last war a Ghurka would continue to laugh even when the man beside him dropped dead. They laugh most heartily and disconcertingly when one is expecting the opposite reaction; this is apparently characteristic of the Nepalese. Never before have I seen so many smiling and laughing faces as there.

I had had a Nepalese servant in Delhi. He did not know a thing when I got him and quite a lot of breaking in was required before he was any use at all. To begin with I would lose my temper with him; it seemed as if he just could not do a thing right. But I soon discovered that it was no use getting annoyed with him. On those occasions Kancha laughed till he cried.

‘What are you laughing at?’ I asked him one day.

‘Madam puts on such a strange face when she gets angry that I must laugh,’ he replied very frankly.

One day I got really annoyed, and when Kancha realized this he rushed into the kitchen. ‘Hurry up, hurry up, come and look at Madam making faces,’ he shouted.

It was impossible for me to explain to him what anger meant.

In the beginning he would eat anything he could find in the larder, and when I complained that he had eaten all we were to have for breakfast, he assured me patiently that our food was first rate and that I must not worry about him. The food tasted better in our house than anywhere else, he would say.

When at last poor Kancha learnt not to eat our food, he grew thinner and thinner. I was really worried that he might have

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contracted tuberculosis. It transpired, however, that he was putting money aside every month to send home to his relatives. He was keeping his old mother and sick sister and did not allow himself sufficient. I could no longer bear to look at that thin face, but on the other hand I could not start giving all the servants their food as well; it was not included in their wages, and once I began I would be landed in the impossible position of having to feed all the servants' relations as well. In despair I used to give Kancha a surreptitious banana or two every day and any remains I could lay my hands on. He no longer helped himself to anything, but his cheeks filled out once more.

I have no idea why he had come to India. One fine day he was found squatting outside our house, and he made us understand that, as we had been visiting his country, it was our duty to look after him when he arrived in India. Besides, he was as hungry as a wolf. We wanted a second footman at that time, so we let him have the job. In the end Kancha became my best servant. But I had to risk a peal of laughter if I showed any signs of bad temper.

Kancha radiated calm. One day, when we were having a large party, the electricity failed, as it so often did. I was standing in the drawing-room and felt as if my brain had stopped working. How were we to get the dinner ready before the guests arrived? Everything seemed hopeless and I was so tired and depressed that I began to cry.

I thought I was alone in the drawing-room, for I had not heard Kancha enter. Suddenly I heard a sobbing voice from the other end of the room:

'Don't be sad, Madam. The sun is still shining, the flowers and birds have not gone.'

'What are you saying, Kancha?'

'I say the sun is shining, and there are flowers and birds here as well.'

Kancha is the personification of Nepal, and it is sheer happiness to have him in the house.

There is something in the Nepalese temperament that resembles Nature itself. They laugh and smile even when sacrificing to their gods. It is not a sectarian god, however; they

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have no idea what sectarianism means and are without the concept of sin. The word 'gossip' does not exist in their language. I discovered to my joy the respect and gentleness with which they treat their animals; at the great festivals they take them with them to the temples so that they can praise the gods for life, food and sunshine. The birds even seemed tamer in Nepal than anywhere else.

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The long isolation of Nepal from the rest of the world was primarily due to its geographical position, the highest mountains in the world forming its boundary. There are now two ways of entering Nepal. One is as we did, by plane over the Himalayas, but this can only be done when the weather is fairly clear. The other is by train, though it stops a few miles inside the border of Nepal, which means that the rest of the way has to be done on horseback, by sedan chair or on foot. The road winds up and down over the mountains, along dizzy precipices, through jungles full of tigers, leopards, snakes and other horrors. If the traveller is lucky he may get on to one of the old asthmatic buses which slowly winds its way up towards Khatmandu; but they don't go very far into Nepal, for soon the road peters out into a narrow path. The pass between India and Nepal is called Chanda Giri and is about 9,000 feet high. The best connection between India and Nepal goes over this pass. The Khatmandu valley and the capital lie at about 4,000 feet above sea level.

Nepal has about eight million inhabitants, though no one knows the exact number as quite a lot of people live on unapproachable shelves high up in the mountains and hence have never appeared in any census. It is very difficult to get any kind of merchandise into Nepal. It has to go either over the high pass or else by a small and very primitive wire-rope which is not able to take heavy weights. If anyone in Khatmandu wants a new car it has to be carried by about 200 coolies along these narrow paths. All the wonderful European and Indian treasures we saw in the Rana family's palaces had either been carried over the pass by coolies or by the wire-rope.

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*

The natural wall to the south has actually supplied the Nepal Government with its isolationist politics through thousands of years. They have always wanted to be the masters of their own house and that is probably the explanation why so few people have been allowed to enter the country. The majority of tourists are still refused a visa, but now they have started building hotels in Nepal and it will probably not be long before the frontiers are opened.

Big game hunters from India have only been allowed into the heart of Nepal on special occasions. The Finnish Marshal Mannerheim, who was an enthusiastic shot, was several times the Maharaja's guest, and he and the Maharaja had been on more than one exciting shoot together.

I asked several times during our stay why a visa to Nepal was usually refused. Shrugging their shoulders, the Nepalese just smiled, and that was all the answer I ever got. They probably felt I ought to be able to read the reply in their frank and open faces. Nepal is a happy country and needs no change, they would probably say. Be that as it may. What happiness has the technical era given the people of the West? Nothing but an ever-increasing demand for luxury and comfort. There is a proverb in Nepal which can be translated: 'He alone is happy who has no demands.'

*

The contrast between the rich and the poor in Nepal is glaring. Most of the inhabitants are poor, but those who are rich are fabulously and unbelievably so.

The Maharaja put it like this: 'If the people have bread they are happy and everyone in this country has bread. Who can say that I am the happier because I have both bread and riches?'

The paradox could be interpreted in more than one way, but as far as I could tell the people were on the whole happy and they certainly did not know hunger.

Another time we were discussing this same topic and the Maharaja said: 'Of course, I know what is usually meant by

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happiness, and according to it I should be a very happy man. But am I? Far from it.'

No wonder the Maharaja was not happy. We were his last guests and soon after we left he was driven out of the country. While we were there he was still the supreme ruler.

A Small Diplomatic Fracas

We had asked the chef de protocol if we could see Mount Everest from one of the mountain-tops. We were all very much looking forward to doing so. The elegant chef de protocol was politeness itself:

‘It is indeed a wonderful sight and it is possible for anyone to go there to see Mount Everest. But alas, at this time of the year it is overcast all the time. I tried meekly to point out that in the very early morning hours there would not be a cloud large enough to cover Mount Everest.

Suddenly his English vocabulary came to an end. A flood of Nepalese lamentations poured from him. He turned, apparently quite casually, to my husband, and started conversing with him on a completely different topic.

I asked Jack, whose wife is from Nepal and who understands Nepalese, what had gone wrong.

‘His Excellency said that Madam looked as if she could get her way anywhere else in the world, but not with the chef de protocol in Nepal. He said he was going to change Madam into a tame tiger before she left Nepal,’ Jack told me.

‘Are you quite certain he said a tame tiger?’ I asked Jack.

Jack assured me that he had not misunderstood the chef de protocol.

I knew where I was at any rate. So I took a deep breath of the wonderful morning air and ingratiatingly and respectfully sidled up to the exalted gentleman. Most of the chefs de protocol are ‘Excellencies’. I knew that Nepal’s chef de protocol was not, but I felt sure he would like very much to be one.

‘Does Your Excellency think it would be possible for us to visit Father Morand? I have heard he is the only missionary

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Nepal has allowed into the country until now. He must be an outstanding personality.'

The chef de protocol seemed quite taken aback.

'With the greatest of pleasure. I am entirely at your Excellency's service.'

The others looked at me in consternation. Annoyed, Marie whispered to me in Swedish-Finnish:

'But it is Mount Everest we want to see.'

'Yes, but that is out of the question on our own. We must get Father Morand to come with us,' I replied.

Father Morand had been in Nepal about a year; he was a learned man who, with his followers, had started a splendid school for the children of the aristocracy in Nepal. Earlier they had had to go all the way to India for their higher education. In Father Morand's college they could now take an examination equivalent to a University entrance examination.

This college was housed in the Prime Minister's summer residence. It had about 150 pupils. We visited various classrooms and everything shone with clinical cleanliness, both the rooms and the pupils.

Quite by chance I managed to talk to Father Morand while no one else was listening.

'Dear Father Morand,' I whispered. 'Could you advise me how one persuades a chef de protocol to take us out to see Mount Everest? I should feel very sad to have to leave Nepal without having seen this famous mountain at close quarters.'

He did not seem a bit surprised and replied quite simply that he quite understood our wish to do so.

'But remember there are local tribal wars going on out there, and it is not so simple to get there. Besides, the whole journey has to be done on horseback. You can only drive the first eighteen kilometers from Khatmandu by car; after that the roads are impassable. Still, I may be able to help you. I know where one can hire horses and ride out to the mountain-top from where one has the best view of Everest. I have been able to help in this way before.'

'Please see if you could help us too,' I said eagerly, 'but don't let anyone know that I have suggested it. You see, I am not a



7. This picture was taken on the road to Tibet.



From a little village in Nepal—inhabitants smiling at the ‘funny, fat stranger.’



8. *Above, left:* A street vendor in Nepal.

Above right: My husband and the Nepalese Chef de Protocol, with whom I had a small diplomatic fracas.

Left: Myself with Nepalese children on the outskirts of Katmandu.

A Small Diplomatic Fracas

diplomat, but I am sure you are and that you will manage to do this for us.'

I saw an amused twinkle in Father Morand's eyes as he left me. I gazed innocently out through the large windows and a little later I casually joined the rest of the party, just in time to hear Father Morand say to my husband:

'Would it interest you to go on a whole day's trip to have a look at Everest? If it would, I have a suggestion to make. We could hire some horses next Sunday, when it is a Nepalese holiday and the horses are not being used. I should enjoy a trip like that myself. Would you care for it?'

'We are indeed grateful to you for your suggestion and I for one would very much like to join you, as long as the chef de protocol has no other plans for us that day,' said my husband, with a bow towards the chef de protocol and Father Morand.

I could see that the chef de protocol was calculating with lightning speed how many soldiers he would have to send off ahead to reconnoitre. Quietly I came to the conclusion that the forty-five Ghurkas who were pottering outside our windows back at Khatmandu ought to be sufficient escort.

'Yes,' came the hesitating answer from the chef de protocol, 'it would be a great pleasure for me to come with you.'

I sighed anxiously. 'Your Excellency is quite sure this plan is convenient to you? As far as we are concerned it would be an experience we should never forget,' I said.

The die had been cast and he assured me that everything was very convenient for him. We had achieved what we wanted and we thanked him warmly for having shown us the school. It certainly was worth seeing and it was remarkable what they had achieved out there in that no-man's-land. With its excellent headmaster it was just like any up-to-date modern American college. The pupils were very well behaved, and as far as clothes were concerned they looked quite European. Their faces were quite expressionless when we told them about modern Finland. Having become accustomed to the open faces of the Nepalese, I left the school wondering whether Western civilization after all is really the best for the people of the

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East. My intelligence prompts me to swear by Western education and culture, but my reckless heart is at one with the people of the East.

As I had won my silent battle with the chef de protocol, I wanted to make him happy. 'Don't you think fifty soldiers are sufficient protection for us?' I enquired, to ease his mind.

'You seem to be able to read my thoughts,' he exclaimed with astonishment.

I looked straight in front of me and said airily: 'Sometimes I am completely lost, but at others I can tell word for word what someone else is thinking. Even tame tigers can use their wits.'

He looked dumbfounded. But I smiled in a friendly way at him and thanked him warmly for wanting to show us Mount Everest.

On the Road to Tibet

It was Sunday in this strange country, and sunrise brought more gifts from the Maharaja. Before we set off to look at Everest four servants arrived with a huge animal on a pole. I was very touched at the gift but could eat none of it.

We rose early, for not only were we going on a long excursion, but we were also taking part in the Divali festivals in the evening. The chef de protocol installed us in one of the Maharaja's magnificent cars. Our party consisted of Father Morand, Hugo, Maria, the chef de protocol and myself. It was a glorious morning. The dew shone in the spiders' webs along the paths where we were driving. The countryside around us looked like a vast Roman arena. The soil was actually cultivated in terraces all up the hillside.

Suddenly the car could go no further. There was not even a path beyond. Four horses were waiting for us, which posed an immediate problem: how were five people to be accommodated on four horses? Everybody looked terribly disappointed. I was least so. On the plane the day we arrived, I had experienced so forcibly the magnificent sight of this giant peak that nothing would ever abolish it from my mind. Besides, who could tell what Mount Everest would seem like to me today? Perhaps it would not seem so impressive as from the plane. Besides, I had had the satisfaction of triumphing over the chef de protocol and that was sufficient for me. I muttered something about being a bad horsewoman, which Hugo smilingly endorsed. Even the chef de protocol was sympathetic and murmured something about the small, slight ponies and Madam's size. This was not meant to be rude, but simply a realistic assessment of a delicate situation.

Soon afterwards I was left alone in the Maharaja's car in

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an unknown village. Something like a hundred natives with their children were surging around the car and every door and window in the village was full of inquisitive faces. They had all dropped whatever they were doing to take a look at the strange goings on.

Fortunately they seemed kindly disposed towards both the car and me. Their curiosity was as natural and astute as that of any peasant in West Jutland, who would have reacted in the same way if a Nepalese had suddenly appeared outside Eyees Hotel in Herning, in magnificently embroidered garb, tied to the back of a white elephant.

The terraces along the mountainside shone like green velvet in the sunshine. Far away the clouds drifted lazily over the eternal snow; it was difficult to decide which were clouds and which were mountains.

I might have been a creature from the moon. They pointed at my riding-boots and breeches and my sun-glasses. It all created a tremendous stir, as did my red leather jacket from Oslo. The latter was admired so much that if it had been possible for all the greedy eyes to take it from me, I most certainly would have been left naked in the car. When they had reassured themselves that I was not dangerous, they ran off to tell all the others. More and more people arrived and soon the Maharaja's car No. 1 was swallowed up in a throng of people. The chauffeur was sitting stiff and unapproachable in front of me, gazing emptily ahead. The car had thick red silk curtains and pigskin upholstery, and the floor was covered with white fur rugs. The spectators were laughing a great deal at me, and chattering away incessantly. A big boy of about nine or ten years had made himself my personal protector. He watched that no one touched the car. As the perspiration was running down the chauffeur's face in rapid streams I had to open the window. He did not move, although it began to get insufferably hot in the car.

When I removed my spectacles to wipe off the perspiration, they laughed so much that they had to sit down to avoid losing their balance. I laughed myself. What a mercy that the chef de protocol was well on his way towards Mount Everest. They

On the Road to Tibet

brought me small gifts. One woman gave me two small eggs. They looked like birds' eggs, but as there were a number of dwarf hens about I realized they must be real hens' eggs. The sick and aged were brought out from the houses and placed on straw mats so that they might enjoy the sight of the car and me. In the end, I could not suffer the heat any longer and got out. The crowd panted with excitement. I tried to pull in my tummy so they should not laugh themselves silly at my plumpness. Eleven stones is a colossal weight for a woman in Nepal.

The car was parked close to the path that led up to the pass leading to Tibet. The strangest people came and went. A Tibetan lama appeared with his followers. He obviously wanted to settle down beside me, so I carefully climbed a small hill. I found some shadow, where I relaxed pleasantly on a tree stump. The lama made a sign to his followers and they all soon joined me. Respectfully his two wives spread two rugs for him to sit on and he arranged himself in the posture of meditation. He had brought with him a small apprentice lama, who carefully imitated every one of his master's movements. They started praying: for every bead they touched on their rosaries they said something like *Daderidaderaderi-derr-aum aum-aum*. It sounded like a long-drawn chant.

The lama wore sun-spectacles and a very ancient European hat; his small disciple had an identical outfit. They wore extraordinary boots made of thick homespun wool embroidered all over with red and blue flowers. Their socks were hand-knitted and lilac-coloured. The women wore long homespun trousers under their billowing skirts. The men had long coats, the women short ones overlaid with jewellery—the most beautiful strings of pearls in every conceivable colour and beautiful bracelets jingled at their smallest movement. Their fingers were adorned with the most extraordinary rings I have ever seen anywhere in the world, and I wished I had brought something I could have exchanged for one of them.

The lama was obviously angry. He was spitting left and right and he hissed at the two women. After a while I discovered the reason for his irritation: his view of me had been obscured

by the crowd that gathered so closely about me. They were all ordered to withdraw, which they did very quickly. This was beginning to be exciting. As long as I did not look behind me it was as if I was alone on the hillside with the lama. But behind me was everything from the village that could walk or crawl. The lama looked quite satisfied now and as long as he smiled I was not frightened. He was praying very earnestly his *Aum-aum-aum-aum*, with much smacking of his lips. The lama looked deeply and with great warmth into my eyes, as if he was about to propose marriage. He made signs to me to come nearer, but I pretended not to understand and looked helplessly in the direction of the Maharaja's car, my only place of security on this strange day.

Every time anyone sneaked in between the lama and myself he ordered the intruder away brutally. I felt quite flattered at his attentions.

Some Tibetans, on their way home, came up from the Khatmandu valley. They stopped a moment to look at the lama and me. They were the wildest type of human creatures I had ever seen: their skins were completely gnarled and they looked as if they had never washed. Their coats were quite stiff with dirt, while their wide silk sashes were comparatively clean and stuffed with parcels. Half a dozen of them were crossing the pass together. It was then October and it must have been bitterly cold up there, and they certainly were equipped as if they were going to the North Pole. Even at its coldest in Finland, people do not wear so many clothes as did these. It was amazing that they were able to walk in them in the mild climate of this valley, but I suppose it was easier to wear them than to carry them as they had quite a lot of baggage.

The lama's womenfolk looked as if they might be good cooks; they were fully occupied with preparing their meal when one of their helpers arrived with some hay and some flowers, an offering from the villagers. The lama took hay in his hand, smelt it and made a grimace; it was easy to see that it was mildewed. He stirred it frantically until all the flowers were mixed in.

One of the women now crawled up to him on her knees

with a bowl of soup in her lifted hands. It was a remarkable piece of balancing and she did not spill a drop. The lama seized the bowl and smelt its contents critically, while the woman lay prostrate before him with her face to the ground.

Fortunately the soup appeared to be passable. The woman wriggled back with her face hidden in her hands. We were all as quiet as mice. The lama lapped up the soup, blowing on it between every mouthful. Next to him and his young apprentice lay the two old European hats, that were so filthy and greasy that one could quite lose one's appetite. But the lama was apparently very proud of them, for time and again he stopped in the middle of his meal to caress them. I was so fully occupied watching this scene that I never noticed that some children from the village had opened my bag and taken out my watch. They were listening blissfully with open mouths to the ticking. One of them took an old electric torch out of my bag and was quite delirious with joy when I made him a present of this treasure. It was a very droll scene. Suddenly one of the lama's women extracted a packet of American cigarettes; she lit one with a twig from the fire and smoked it with great experience and enjoyment. The other woman settled down with her pipe. The rice and meat smelt good and the lama made signs for me to join in the meal, but I did not dare, for plenty of diseases were certainly represented around me. One woman had a growth on her neck as big as a child's head, and quite a lot of them had legs as big as elephants. There were quite a few lepers, too.

'No, thank you,' I said, and pointed at my tummy with a suffering gesture, as if I was in pain. I had learnt this trick long ago when I did not wish to hurt a person's kind invitation to share some strange Indian meal. Everybody sympathises with tummy-ache, which is the great common complaint, since about eighty per cent of the population suffer from it. They all looked at me with the greatest sympathy, so I made a few grimaces for safety's sake, as if the pains really were as much as I could bear. I was as hungry as a raven and my party had forgotten to leave me any food.

Each time the lama wanted another bowl of soup the women

had to wriggle up to him on their stomachs. They had boiled a kid, and this they now proceeded to tear up with their fingers to be eaten with a highly spiced sauce. Afterwards they brought out the pudding that was wrapped in large green leaves and tied up with fibre. This was really a meal to tempt one.

Then the small apprentice wriggled up to the lama with an old book. It was a kind of *Pali*, and that the lama could read created a great stir. But I was not convinced that he was really master of the art, for he held the book at a very peculiar angle and his eyes were directed elsewhere than at the letters in the book.

The food that was left over was packed into large green leaves and tucked under their sashes. Then the lama and his party got up to resume their wandering: he himself went in front, followed by the young lama, then the men and the two women. Before they left the whole party, with the aid of grimaces which looked very much like friendly smiles, made me understand that they approved of me. I felt I had made new friends. Later on in the afternoon the path that led to Tibet was teeming with people either coming or going. Most of them were Tibetans. All carried heavy burdens and some were almost dropping with fatigue.

A flock of Tibetans had left a little girl behind as they continued their journey. She was thin and fragile and crying in the most heartbreaking manner, pressing her two small hands against her eyes. She was left because her party did not think she was strong enough to stand the strain of the trip across the mountain. There were several children in the other parties who were playing in and out among the adults. I was almost sick with pity for the child and seriously contemplated adopting her, but both Hugo and the chef de protocol told me that this was quite impossible.

I asked the chef de protocol what would happen to this little girl, and he told me that if she survived her illness at all, she would be used for any kind of rough work in the village. Later, she would end up among the prostitutes. The village was very grateful for these little girls the Tibetans left behind. Such incidents happened frequently.

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Those who were to cross the pass I could follow with my eyes for quite a long way up the path to giddy heights. In the clear mountain air it looked as if it was a good day's march up to the pass, to the border of Tibet; but in reality it was much further, and took about seven days. The pass was about 12,000 feet high, and it was there that the actual trip into Tibet began. I did not know that the Tibetans could move so freely across the borders of Nepal, for all afternoon the path was full of people who were either coming or going.

Somewhere near Khatmandu there was an entirely Tibetan town called Bauta, at the heart of which was a temple where the eyes of life had been painted. In Bauta the Tibetans could take a rest before continuing their trip.

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Now that there was no lama to chase them away, the villagers had crowded round me once more. My little wristwatch was handed from one to the other and all were struck with amazement at its ticking. Only grandfather clocks were known out there, though heaven knows where they came from.

One man took out his shepherd's flute and started to play. The music was wild and primitive and the crowd immediately fell silent. The tune was of one note which was repeated in various keys from the deepest base to the highest treble. Then all the villagers round me started to sing a tune that was almost like a Danish part song, lively and aggressive, abandoned and optimistic. With signs and queer grimaces they made me understand that they wanted me to sing too. I have no voice at all, but as there was no one to jeer at me here I began to sing a small ditty of my own which I had improvised one summer on a beach near Halmstad for the benefit of some small, fair, curly-headed Norwegian and Swedish children.

These were the words:

I am a little boy
In the land of Sweden.
Two small fairies have come
To play with me so nicely.
Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!

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The children are supposed to sit with crossed legs, clapping their hands on each of their knees in turn. When the fairies come they stretch their hands up high and with their fingers show how they are tripping in. At the hurrahs they are all supposed to clap together. This silly little song was a roaring success and the whole village learnt the words, the tune and the gestures with remarkable quickness. It was a very curious experience to listen to a whole Nepalese village singing in a mixture of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. Even senile old people joined in. I am sure if I returned to this village now they would still be able to sing it. They have few contacts with the outer world up there.

The shadows grew longer, and far in the distance I could at last descry some tired ponies and their equally tired riders. Even the chef de protocol looked like any ordinary person. They were all red with sunburn and white with dust. But they had seen Mount Everest and they talked excitedly about all the precipices they had passed and how it was a wonder that they were still alive. They were, in short, in great spirits, though I felt they might have curtailed their boasting a little. They had finished all the food, and there was not a crumb for me. But in our different ways we had all of us had a wonderful day.

The Festival of Hearts and Lights

The Divali celebrations in Nepal occurred on the same night, and we had fortunately arrived in time to participate. Divali is the autumn festival, an occasion of joy and revelry. Every house was lit with small candles, and even in the very poorest you could see tiny clay saucers with primitive wicks serving as lamps. Lakshmi, the goddess of love and happiness, apparently prefers houses that are well lit.

Throughout the year both adults and children look forward to the festival. New clothes are bought for the various members of the family, and new accounts are started in the shops, as all debts have to be paid by this day. Home-made garlands of coloured tissue paper are stretched from one house to another, and cakes and all kinds of sweetmeats have been prepared so that there is something for everyone to look forward to.

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The Divali festival was celebrated in memory of Rama's fight with the brutal King of Ceylon, who had kidnapped Rama's wife, Sita. Rama had tried to get her back several times, but without success, so he turned to Hanuman, the God of the Apes, to help him in his difficulty. Hanuman promised to help, and they went together to Ceylon and there managed to rescue Sita and bring her back to her homeland. The whole population rejoiced with Rama and candles were lit in every room. This was the origin of the Divali festival which was one of the great occasions of the Hindu Year.

After dinner I went straight up to an old temple which stood on a small mountain above Khatmandu. I sat there on the thousand-year-old temple wall with the town far below me in

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the valley. The sun was sending its last rays out over the snow-clad mountains, turning everything to gold and purple, when something rather strange occurred: the lights in the valley and in the sky seemed to light up simultaneously. It was as if the Almighty Himself wanted to compete with man to see who could light their candles the quickest. The stars were glittering all over the sky and there were Divali lights on every roof-top, in every window, along every road and on the smallest path. It was like standing in the middle of the universe with millions of stars both above and below me.

Walking about in this town of temples was a romantic experience. The chief temple was built in the Tibetan style and was circular. There seemed to be hundreds of entrances to it and behind every entrance was an altar to a particular god. In a half-circle round the temple lay the smaller temples and between them there was a wide road thronged with people, all busily engaged in visiting their gods. They sacrificed small candles, rice and flower-garlands, and as they wandered from temple to temple they chanted hymns from the Hindu scriptures.

The town is the oldest in Nepal and, according to legend, Buddha stayed there. He was in fact a Nepalese prince, born about 2,500 years ago, and there were hundreds of altars to him as well as to Rama, Sita and other gods.

The gods are naturally and closely connected with life in Nepal. I noticed a woman who came waddling out from an opening in one of the temples. She had a tiny candle in her hand and seven small rice corns which she placed carefully one by one in front of the small altar.

At last I got up and started walking down the street between the temples. Now and again I peeped down at the rest of our party, but took good care that they did not see me. I wanted to have this experience all to myself. As every little entrance to the temples was packed with candles and people, it was impossible to see which were the temples and which the ordinary houses. Three Indians suddenly stopped in front of me, a man and two women.

The Festival of Hearts and Lights

‘Why are you here all alone?’ one of them inquired. ‘Where do you come from and who are you?’

‘From nowhere and everywhere. What about you?’ I asked.

‘From the same place as you, our common home in the universe,’ they replied smilingly.

‘Join us,’ they said. ‘We know a temple where there is a particularly beautiful ceremony just now.’

‘But I am not allowed into the temples as I am not one of your race,’ I said.

‘Oh yes, if we take you, you will be allowed in.’

We removed our shoes and I followed them into one of the temples. A moment later I was standing with them before an image which seemed to be almost alive. I was given a candle, some grains of rice and a bit of incense, which I placed in front of the altar. My Indian friends threw themselves down in front of the god and prayed long and fervently. It was a curious experience—to sacrifice to an unknown god. But it had happened so often to me in India that by now the image of any god seemed to symbolise for me the one God I sense behind everything. After some time in the East, it seemed impossible not to believe that the temples one sees there are not built to honour our God and that we Christians must learn to share our God with the whole universe. The Indians took me back to my own party. My little excursion away from time and place had come to an end. On our return we were introduced to each other. My guide turned out to be the adviser of the King of Nepal and his wife and daughter. We smiled at each other at our share in this little adventure.

The following day we were invited to dine with the King of Nepal and his two Queens, who were sisters. When we arrived at the palace I was met by my three Indian friends from the Divali festival. We were all delighted to meet again.

But everything comes to an end and the day of our departure arrived. The Maharaja’s parting presents overwhelmed us. They included large shrines covered with turquoise, boxes of sandalwood and ivory, large temple-candelabra, Ghurka knives, ivory knives and silk brocades. When I told the Maharani how overwhelmed we felt at all these exquisite gifts, she replied:

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‘You came here to us, smiling and friendly, when we most needed encouragement. What are these gifts as compared to all you have given us of warmth and sympathy?’

In the Shadow of the Himalayas

An Evening in Benares

I was sitting in Clark's Hotel in Benares, thinking of my experiences, when a servant entered.

'Memsahib,' he said, 'there is a very holy Sadhu outside who would like to say salaam to Madam.'

I was rather tired and wanted to be left alone, so I asked him to tell the Sadhu to return at sunrise.

I could not give any definite time as the Sadhus have no watches. A little later the servant returned, looking very embarrassed, and whispered to me:

'Memsahib, this Sadhu won't leave. He says that Madam will be very, very happy to see him.'

Well, there was no alternative. I had to go out to him, for a Sadhu will not enter a house just anyhow. A tall, straight figure, dressed in a saffron-coloured lama coat with a turban in the same colour, got up from the ground and came to me.

'Hallo, Birgitte,' he called out in Danish, with a strong Jutland accent.

I was overwhelmed. 'Alfred Sørensen! How wonderful to see you again.'

He came originally from Hasselager, near Aarhus, where his father owned a farm. Alfred had actually been trained as a nurseryman and when quite young left for England to study. But he had always felt irresistibly drawn towards Indian mystics, and one day during his stay in England he was given the opportunity to go to India. In the end he got as far as the Himalayas, where he joined some Holy Men; by this time he had stayed in India for about twenty-two years.

I had met Alfred Sørensen earlier in Delhi, where he used to visit us now and again. I had told him that my husband and I were going on a mission to the holy city, and now he had

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found his way there too. My fatigue had vanished and from old habit I said:

‘Do come in and have a drink, Alfred.’

‘But Birgitte, surely you know that I only eat and drink once a day at sunset?’

I looked wonderingly at him before I quite grasped what he was saying, and at last I exclaimed:

‘So you have really become a pukka Sadhu then, Alfred?’

He laughed quietly and in a friendly way.

‘Does it matter how one lives, as long as one concentrates fully and completely on whatever one is doing?’

I seized this opportunity to ask him how he had become a hermit in the Himalayas.

‘Surely, Birgitte, you have lived long enough in India to have seen what queer things happen to people here? For me, going up to the Himalayas and living there came quite naturally. Those Sadhus live far away in the Himalayas,’ he continued, ‘and I started living just like them. They explained their philosophy to me. And by degrees I quite naturally felt like them and dressed in the same way. Now I have been accepted into their brotherhood. This kind of life would suit you admirably, Birgitte.’

‘I could never leave my home for ever.’

‘You say “home”—but home is wherever you happen to be at the moment. That is one’s only true home on this earth,’ he said.

We went outside the hotel. The air was filled with curious sounds, eternal as life itself. It was very odd walking about in Benares and talking Danish with a holy man.

‘Do you belong to any particular Sadhu sect or are you just one of those who wander about and find God in everything? I feel there are too many sects among the Sadhus and they often seem to cling rather too exclusively to what they call the only true knowledge—which is always their own.’

It was impossible to draw Alfred. All that he would say was:

‘Of course, it takes time before an ordinary earthly being can depart from everything he has been taught and learn to experience life as a whole. All religions have the same origin.

An Evening in Benares

But we often have to fumble about far too long in our own inner world before we discover this. The truth about God is not to be found outside. It is hidden within our own souls where we shall one day be united with everything else on this planet and in the whole universe.'

'But you must admit that there are a lot of people who derive comfort and inspiration from their own special religions. Not everyone has the chance to go off to the Himalayas and meditate upon the depths of existence.'

'No one demands that from any of us. But we have all got a bit of the Himalayas inside us, unapproachable standards that it is impossible to reach. All said and done, we don't exist just for the sake of religion. We need the gods for inspiration so that they may illuminate our wanderings on this earth. They are like beacons in the night. We can warm our hands by them and learn a lot from them. But every human being is his own North Star on the road of life.'

I pondered a bit over this reply and neither of us said anything for a while. I looked at Alfred; he was still a compatriot of mine, but he looked undeniably Indian. If one did not know his origin nor notice his blue eyes, it would be difficult for anyone to see a difference between him and his Sadhu brothers. He was dressed exactly like the other holy men, and he spoke Hindustani like a native.

One day, while I was showing New Delhi to a Swedish friend, she suddenly called out to me:

'Birgitte! Birgitte, look! A holy man!'

The holy man walked straight up to me, and my friend must have been a little surprised when she heard him say in a broad Jutland accent:

'Hallo, Birgitte. May I come and see you one of these days?'

The first time I encountered Alfred in India was when he suddenly appeared at our house one day and introduced himself. He told us then that he was from Jutland and had lived in Almora, the holy men's community in the Himalayas. It seemed to irritate me somehow that Alfred had achieved some kind of inner balance that I had not acquired.

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'Tell me, Alfred. Do you never get into a terrible temper?' I asked.

He laughed heartily at the question.

'No, there does not seem to be anything to get into a temper about any longer. I seem to have reached some inner peace and understanding.'

'But do you ever feel a real exuberant joy? Do you ever sink into a deep, black despair?'

Once more he laughed that strange, harmonious laughter of his, which did really seem as if it was liberated from joy or sorrow.

'No,' he said, 'I feel as if everything is harmonious inside me, pain, joy, laughter and tears. I have learnt to take everything as it comes.'

'Do you often starve?'

'No, I wouldn't call it starving. But I fast quite a bit. It clears one's thoughts to a remarkable degree.'

It was getting late.

'Shall I see you tomorrow, Alfred?'

'No, I shall be on my way back to the Himalayas then. I have been a bit too long down here in the lowlands. Spring is coming and I want to get home . . .'

'But you said just a minute ago that your home is where you happen to be at the moment.'

'That is so, but even animals have a place they return to. Now I am returning to my cave. Something up there is calling me.'

We greeted each other in the Indian way with our palms touching.

'We will always meet somewhere or other, Birgitte,' he said quietly as he wandered off.

I remained where I was till I saw him disappear in the dark. Then I turned and went back to the hotel and its cold, white electric glare. In my room everything had been prepared for the night. The bed was turned down, there was fruit and iced water by my bedside. But before I went to sleep I followed Alfred in my thoughts. He preferred walking at night, he had told me, when it was cool.

An Evening in Benares

‘But aren’t you frightened of all the wild beasts?’ I asked him in my thoughts, and I seemed to hear him reply:

‘Oh, no, they would never hurt me, because I feel in unison with them.’

The Pilgrims and the Ganges

Benares is known as one of the oldest cities in the world and one of the holiest in India. Every year millions of pilgrims flock there to bathe in the sacred waters of the Ganges.

Benares is also known for its beautiful handicrafts, wood-carving, shawls, silks and the handsomest saris in India. The Benares brocade is of quite exceptional beauty.

The Indian name for Benares is Kashi. In the evening the pilgrims to Kashi sacrifice little candles to Mother Ganges and in the morning they sacrifice flowers. As one travels down the river one can see the pilgrims put the most exquisite flowers on large palm leaves, to drift down the stream to their unknown destination. It is wonderful to see the expression in the pilgrims' eyes when they take their first bathe in the Ganges. Even in the poorest and most harrowed face there is a fanatical joy as the river water cleanses their bodies and souls from all evil. They take these bathes very seriously and scrub and rub each other, since it is from years of sin that they have to cleanse themselves. They also drink the water at the same time, to be cleansed inside as well as out. For a European it would be suicide to drink the Ganges water. Corpses are daily lowered into it, and these are the corpses that are not allowed to be burnt, the victims of black smallpox or leprosy. The bodies of all real Sadhus and of children under five are sunk with heavy stones in the middle of the river. They do sink, but it happens sometimes that the stones are not secured firmly enough and then the bodies rise again. As a rule the fish are busy with it a few hours after a corpse has been sunk and thus help to keep the water cleansed. All the same it seems incomprehensible that people do not contract the most awful illnesses by drinking the filthy water. It is claimed, however, that the Ganges

The Pilgrims and the Ganges

cannot carry infection because its water contains certain properties that kill all bacteria. The city's sewers also run out just where the pilgrims go to bathe. To us from Europe it is inconceivable that anyone could enjoy bathing there.

But there are many strange and thought-provoking sights to be met there. I remember seeing an old woman coming down to have her bathe. Her children were middle-aged and were helping her down the stone stairs. She could hardly walk and it took her a long time to bathe, but when she got up no one needed to help her. Her back had become erect like that of a young person as she walked up in front of her children. It struck me how many old people just fade away from a loss of belief in themselves as they get older. We sat for a long time in a boat out on the Ganges, watching the people bathe. Later we went to the cremation area, where there was a continuous procession of corpses being carried down to be burnt. It was very quiet there and one could only hear the crackling of the fire and the thud of the carriers' bare feet on the stone steps. The dead bodies are carried on bamboo poles, the males covered with a white cloth, the females as a rule with an orange or red sari.

Only men attend the cremations, for the women cry too much. That evening an old Indian was at his wife's cremation. He had walked there among his sons and his male relations and suddenly he threw himself over her body and cried aloud. When the flames swept up round the body, the relations had to hold him back as he tried to throw himself into the flames. It was a pathetic sight. Even our hardened guide was not untouched by the scene.

When a corpse has been brought to the Ganges, its sins are washed away by the body being dipped a few times in the water, while it is lying on the bamboo-stretcher. The hair is then cut off and, if it is a man, the beard is shaved. Then the living step aside and buy wood for the burning. If the relations are wealthy, they may buy as much as ten *maund* of wood, about 900 lbs. The poor have to manage with 250 lbs. After this they go to the oil merchant and buy oil with which to soak the wood, and then they must go up to the small temple to

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get fire for lighting the pyre. The poor do not pay much for the fire, but for a wealthy person the price may run to about 1,000 rupees. The whole cremation process takes about five hours. Strangely enough there is nothing gruesome about it. In fact the whole thing seems natural and rather beautiful.

Officially India has 'only' fourteen languages, though 220 would be nearer the mark, and they can all be heard by the shores of the Ganges. An expert can even tell from what part of the country the various types and dresses come. There are pilgrims from Kashmir, Madras, Cochin, the Malabar coast, Kanpur, Bombay and the Himalayas. When these pilgrims return to their villages after a visit to the holy river, they are held in even greater esteem than the village priest, who may never have bathed in the Ganges or been so close to the gods.

Fakirs and Holy Men

India and mysticism go together. Every Indian has his eyes open to this aspect of things. They have certainly an inborn respect for everything supernatural. I was interested in the so-called miracles of the fakirs and investigated them as often as I had an opportunity. There is quite a lot of humbug in them, as far as I could make out. They appeal understandably to the strong urge for the mystical in the people. The power of hypnosis makes it possible for the fakir to hypnotise his audience into seeing the things he is describing to them. But there are things, too, which really do look like miracles, and although I cannot explain or prove the assertion I am convinced they are not miraculous but in accord with natural law in a way that we Westerners have not yet discovered.

The most surprising performance I saw in all my stay in India was a fakir who could change stone into sugar. Once I met him at Birla House and was determined to put him to the test. I had brought with me a brick with the factory number on it. To secure a brick-shaped piece of sugar with exactly the same factory number on it seemed a lot to ask even of a fakir, and the possibility of any trickery seemed remote as he was surrounded by spectators. He could hardly carry any elaborate chemical preparations as he was wearing nothing but a loin cloth.

I gave the fakir the brick. He touched it and it changed to sugar while we were watching. The colour and the factory mark were exactly the same as on the brick, but it had become sugar. I broke off a piece and tasted it. It was sweet and sugary. I have kept a piece to this day and have never ceased to wonder at the transformation I saw. It is still sugar, which excludes any suggestion of hypnosis.

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The same fakir changed an aluminium teaspoon into a gold one. And I have seen another fakir drink a bottle of concentrated hydrochloric acid. Some doctors were present, a couple of Danish and Finnish doctors among them, and they all assured us that the bottle did contain hydrochloric acid. The fakir put the bottle to his mouth and emptied it and it was impossible to detect any visible effect on him. A tiny drop of the same acid was dropped on the hand of one of the spectators and immediately produced an ugly red mark and a horrible smarting pain. The only condition the fakir demanded was that he could stand with his feet in a basin of water. It is possible that he had eaten or drunk something which protected him against the effect of the hydrochloric acid, although he himself insisted that he got the strength to resist the poison purely through meditation.

I have also witnessed the well-known fakir performance of walking on red-hot cinders. I investigated the cinders myself and singed my hand by just holding it near them. The fakir, however, was quite unhurt after having walked quietly over a ditch, nine feet by three feet, filled with red-hot cinders.

On another occasion, in one of the guest-houses of the Birla temples, I saw a holy man lift a chair entirely by will-power. There were several of us collected round him and he told us that it had taken him thirty years to learn what he was going to show us. He asked us to assist him by using our own will-power. He then gazed intently on the chair and it actually raised itself about two feet into the air, after which it fell to the floor with a crash.

To a European just arrived in India these exploits seem very impressive. But after some years I found that my interest in such things soon cooled. Once it is accepted that it is possible to do them, the question arises why so much time should be spent in learning to accomplish them. When one can lift a chair with one's hand why spend thirty years of one's life learning to do the same by will-power? We live in a world where there is plenty of use for will-power for other purposes.

One can understand the many Indians who feel that these holy men are parasites. Their tricks are no use to anyone either

Fakirs and Holy Men

spiritually or materially, and some holy men can be dangerous if they get too fond of money. I read recently in an Indian paper about a holy man who asked a student for a rupee for food. This is a lot of money to a poor student and he told the holy man to change his rupee piece and give him half a rupee back. At this the man became livid. He gave the student his half rupee, but the minute the coin touched his hand the student fell dead. Either the coin had been poisoned, or the student had died from fear. No one will ever know.

The holy men can be dangerous in other ways, too. The one who let himself be buried alive in a cave outside Delhi created quite a stir. I saw him being buried and learnt that he was going to stay there for three weeks. When the time was over I read in the papers that the experiment had not been successful. When they dug him out at the agreed time the man had already started to decompose.

The more I got to know India the more I realised the real potentialities of the genuine holy Sadhus, the peace, the understanding and harmony that emanate from them. When one meets these holy men one is in no doubt that there is something very special about them. They are not interested in food or money and very rarely mix with people. One realizes that they have reached a stage where the ordinary human problems have been solved and that their self-knowledge is so profound that it is difficult for us to understand. It must have been a long and painful road. It is miraculous how they have managed to delve so deeply into the immaterial world, almost as if they have allied themselves to certain natural powers and have learnt to use them unselfishly as a way to help humanity.

We catch a Thief

Misfortunes have a way of coming when one least expects them. For a long time we had been very lucky in every possible way, but one day things suddenly took to disappearing. This had not occurred since my nail scissors had disappeared years before. First of all some lingerie had disappeared, then an evening frock, then a mackintosh, several sports jackets, and so on. I had a meeting with the servants and we searched the whole house. In the end we came to the conclusion that the things must have been stolen.

Naturally, each of the servants solemnly declared that he or she had no idea where the articles were, but it was obvious that the thief must be in our midst. We did not want to bring in the police, so we decided to find the thief ourselves. My husband thought we ought to be kind-hearted and write the things off as lost, but I did not agree, for the more lightly we treated our losses the more we would lose.

So it was agreed among us to 'sit' in the Indian fashion until we had solved the mystery. We started while the master was having his siesta. Each of us found a quiet place. The dhobi settled on the roof of the servants' quarters, where he started singing *mantras* to ask the gods' assistance. Both the sweepers sat in a corner of the garden and murmured to themselves. Jack and Kancha, who settled in front of a door, were evidently also praying to their gods. The cook was meditating on a box in the kitchen, while the gardener settled down by the Sauna bath. I myself sat on the wall facing Prithvarij Road and watched the people coming and going. I soon began to feel it was a mistake not to have gone to the police after all. A senior police officer would have been able to help us in a discreet way so that the consequences of his discovery would not have been

We Catch a Thief

very deadly for the sinner. So I decided that I would let the police know after all. Having reached this decision, I collected the staff on the verandah behind the house. But when I had told them my decision, the cook said reproachfully:

‘Memsahib, every memsahib would call the police. But we in India have our own ways. If Memsahib will leave us alone for a bit, we shall find a way.’

I went out. It might have been instructive to listen to them, but I would not have understood their Hindustani. After a quarter of an hour they called me and proposed that we should send for a soothsayer.

‘She is sure to be able to help us,’ said Jack, ‘but it will cost ten rupees and we shall have to fetch her by car, as she lives out in Old Delhi.’

‘All right,’ I said, ‘but if you haven’t found the thief by to-morrow morning I will take the matter into my own hands.’

So Birbal went off to Old Delhi to fetch Sister Ramkishn. I must say she looked most peculiar. She had large coal-black eyes, her brow was criss-crossed with black and white lines, and she looked deep into my eyes before she said:

‘Free your mind of all superficial and emotional thoughts and prepare to see the truth.’

I was ordered to sit down and await developments. A black line was hung up in one of the open doors, and to the end of this she tied a small package of crushed incense. All the servants were then asked to enter. They stood in a row in front of Sister Ramkishn, and as she pointed to the incense which was dangling from the end of the line she said in a hollow voice:

‘This house harbours a thief. Each of you must now come here in turn and hold the package of incense in his hand. If one of you is the thief, the line will wind round his hand so that he cannot get loose. Memsahib go first.’

‘But surely you can’t think I stole my own things?’ I said, bewildered.

‘No one knows who is the thief,’ said Sister Ramkishn firmly.

Feeling rather embarrassed, I went over and squeezed the incense between my fingers. It looked to me as if the line was

fairly dancing and I felt numb with horror lest it should twine itself round my wrist. Fortunately no such thing occurred. I heaved a sigh of relief and decided not to punish the guilty party when he was found.

One by one the servants came up and squeezed the incense with both hands. It was their own choice and I was thankful that I had completed the ordeal myself.

The dhobi looked grey with fear and murmured his *mantras* all the time when his turn came. He trembled so that the line vibrated, but it did not wind itself round his wrist. None of the others was disgraced in this way either. Finally only two were left—the sweeper and his young assistant, who had only been with us six months. The sweeper, too, was very anxious, but nothing happened to him. Finally it was the turn of the assistant sweeper. He stood fumbling with the package for some time, but nothing happened to him either.

We were all relieved and looked enquiringly at Sister Ramkishn. But it was soon clear that we had not yet reached the end. Now she wanted to smell our hands. She sniffed thoroughly until she came at last to the assistant sweeper.

‘This is the thief,’ she said with a firm voice. ‘He has not squeezed the package; there is no smell of incense from his hands.’

The man immediately threw himself down on the ground in front of me and wept profusely. But Jack was so angry that he hurled himself at the culprit. Forgetting his caste and everything else, he screamed ferociously.

‘I’ll kill you, the way you have tortured all of us.’

Luckily I was able to get them parted. The young sweeper left the house without any references. He had had punishment enough for what he had done.

When I told Hugo about what had happened, he thought it was sheer sadism. I cannot say I was very happy about the whole affair. My only comfort was Jack’s telling me that the rice test was far worse. In this test everyone has to eat a spoonful of rice, chew it well and then swallow it. If after twenty-four hours you have a bad stomach-ache you are a thief. I suppose it is probably nervousness that makes the inside react in that way.

A Tiger Hunt in Kumaon

There were seven of us in the jeep on our way out to Jim Corbett's place to hunt tigers. It was there that the world-famous English hunter and author killed those man-eating beasts. He lived in Ranikhet, at the foot of the Himalayas, and had done his hunting in Kumaon, where we were now going.

I was sitting in front with our Indian chauffeur. In the back seat were four Finns, and standing up in the jeep was our host, a Greek doctor with his gun at the ready, though what he wanted it for I could not conceive, as they were not the kind of guns usually employed for shooting tigers. My husband was away on a mission to Peking and his last words to me had been:

'Look after the Finnish colony while I am away, Birgitte.'

I had promised to do my best—and this was how I kept it!

The party I was in was really on its way to Almora and Ranikhet in the Himalayas. Among our fellow passengers were the Finnish X-ray expert, Kaj Noschis, who was working with the World Health Organisation in New Delhi. His wife, Anneli, was also with us. In addition there were Hugo's private secretary, Lisa Hagelberge, Dr Lantman and his Swedish wife. It is impossible to go from New Delhi to Almora in one day, so it was natural for us to wish to spend the night at the Haldwani malaria station in Kumaon with the Greek doctor, Issary. He was also in the World Health Organisation, and working in one of the world's worst malaria districts, a task he and his fellow workers were tackling with admirable courage and energy. To him tigers were a daily phenomenon. Though they are not all dangerous to human beings, nevertheless forty-five people had been killed by tigers in the district during the past few years.

It was with such thoughts whirling in my head that I sat

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watching the bad and bumpy road we were driving along. I was looking at the Indian by the steering wheel. He was behaving in the queerest fashion, as if frightened. But I decided I must be mistaken as behind me the others were talking and joking as if it was a cosy little Sunday excursion fraught with no danger at all. It was getting darker and darker, however, and the jungle seemed to become more and more dense on each side of the narrow road.

'This is the place where one of my nurses saw a whole tiger family the other day,' said Dr Issary.

I felt faintly sick and my feet seemed to have become cold and clammy. The road was getting increasingly narrow. Now the jungle was closing in on the jeep on either side. It was my job to work the spotlight, so that the doctor could see to shoot. Time after time we had to stop, partly because the road was in a terrible condition even for a jeep, but also because our poor chauffeur was trembling like a leaf.

At one point we drove over a thick log lying across the road. That is, we thought it was a log, but when it began to wriggle behind us we realized it must have been a boa constrictor. We stopped the car, but the reptile had already vanished.

'Could a panther manage to jump down on the car, do you think?' I enquired with forced calm, so that the others should not discover how petrified I was.

'Wild animals are just as frightened of the jeep as we are of them,' the doctor replied.

Before long we stopped again and this time the chauffeur was trembling so much that he could not restart the car. I discovered that he had not turned on the ignition key. Then the moon came out in the narrow opening above the road, and never before in my long adventurous life have I been more happy to see it than I was then. It seemed to remind one of everything that was secure and safe at home. Feverishly I turned the spotlight on to the jungle and soon the moon disappeared again.

'Throw the light in front,' commanded the Finns in low voices.

A Tiger Hunt in Kumaon

I sent the light forward and in that moment three yellow beasts with shining eyes jumped across a gap in the jungle. Behind me I heard the cocking of the gun, but the animals had disappeared long before the doctor had had time to shoot.

Then I broke down. More than fifty years of constant training in self-discipline availed me nothing.

'Those were tigers!' I whispered. 'Real tigers. I want to go home . . . home to Denmark and Finland. I want to go home.'

'Quiet!' someone in the back of the jeep was muttering. 'It was only deer, but there might be some tigers after them.'

Tigers, panthers, boa constrictors, cobras, scorpions, everything danced before my eyes. They were hanging from every bush, trying to seize me while we were driving past them. Later, when it was all over, the doctor gave us a scientific explanation of my condition. I had been seized by jungle fear, something latent in all primitive people. And, as an artist, I suppose I may be more primitive than most people.

I do not know what actually happened. The only thing I could manage to do at that moment was to tell the chauffeur to turn and drive home. But the road was too narrow for turning the jeep.

'A little further on is a pit they use for catching tigers and there we can turn,' said the doctor.

The Finns suddenly lost all their interest in the tiger hunt and seemed to be more concerned about me. The youngest, the wife of the X-ray specialist, held me like a child in her arms and talked comfortingly to me about the winter campaign in Finland.

'I can remember when there really was something to be frightened of,' she said. 'That was when we were driving along those narrow forest roads when the Russians had their machine-gun nests along the edge of the forest. They were lying there, shooting away at us.'

It appeared that all the Finns in the jeep had taken part in the war either as officers or nurses. The Greek doctor, too, had been in his country's war for about two years. Only the Indian chauffeur and I had been saved such horrors, which was perhaps the reason why we lost our nerves so completely.

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At last we got to the spot where we could turn. There was a well-camouflaged tiger pit, and I looked hesitatingly in its direction.

The jeep jumped and skipped joyfully on its homeward journey and we had to cling to our seats with both hands. Even the doctor had to drop his rifle. Never before have I enjoyed a suicidal journey so much. As we drove on to the so-called main road a small hare rushed across it. The doctor seized his gun and fired his first shot of the evening—but without success.

As we returned home to a late, hot dinner, I begged the Finns not to tell my husband about my behaviour. After all, I had come with them to protect them.

The Kumbhamela Festival

To one arriving from the plains on a boiling hot day the first glimpse of the summits of the Himalayas was as if the eyes were cleansed from the dust accumulated through a long life. The pinnacles shine blue-white as they tower upwards. Without a painter's brush it is difficult to describe the almost merciless beauty, the exalted and majestic calm, the changing play of colours, the flight of the clouds among the mountain-tops and the sun glittering in the snowstorms raging on those completely impassable heights.

Could it really be true that I was in the heart of the Himalayas, at Gangotri, the holy springs of the Ganges, gazing into the most beautiful mountains in the world? The Ganges runs down the valley to Hardwar and from there it descends to the plains below. According to an ancient Indian myth a fight for life and death took place there between the gods and the demons over Amrita, the nectar of eternal life. The gods won, but during the fight some drops of Amrita fell into the river at the place now called Hardwar. For this reason it became so holy that for thousands of years gods as well as men have taken pilgrimages to the place to bathe in it. They go there to be cleansed of all their sins. Even gods, it seems, may sin.

If you have bathed at Hardwar, all your sins, both in this life and in earlier lives, are forgiven. If possible your relations, after your death, take your ashes to the Ganges. After a great many ceremonies the priests will throw your ashes into the Ganges to prevent you from being reincarnated on this earth either as a human being or in any animal form. However tempting it might seem to be reborn either in the Brahman or the warrior caste, Nirvana's eternal peace is far preferable.

Ordinarily, Hardwar is a peaceful, dreamy place, but every

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twelfth year the town awakes from its hibernation and pilgrims from all over India crowd into the place to obtain forgiveness for their sins. For who is there who has not sinned? Even the most holy may by mistake tread on an insect in his wanderings in the jungles and mountains. The gospel of Ahimsa, which forbids any killing, is taken so seriously in India that even the loneliest and most holy have to undertake the long march, which is often a matter of hundreds of miles. The pilgrims come from the jungles, from the icy heights of Tibet, and from the tropical plains. Many of them only show themselves to the people this once in twelve years. At the festival I am about to describe there were no less than two million pilgrims.

*

It was the morning of the Kumbhamela festival in Hardwar. A more incredible ocean of humans I had never expected to see except in a nightmare. That was my first impression when we neared Hardwar, coming from Gangotri. Our car was stopped by an Indian Officer, who told us he had been sent to take us straight to the Government tent. From there we might watch the human throng in peace and quiet and follow the procession of holy men on their way to the Ganges to bathe. With the aid of the officer and in a surprisingly short time—by roads shut to others—we reached the large and wonderfully cool tent. There we met several members of the Indian Government whom we knew from New Delhi. The whole thing reminded me, in point of fact, of a diplomatic reception in the capital, with the important difference that we were the only Europeans present.

Through a very modern loudspeaker system the announcement was made that the first procession was now about to take its bathe. And far away we could see them, like a shiny snake, in the milling crowd of human beings. Between us and the procession there were tens of thousands of people and to my great disappointment it was impossible to get a close look at the procession from where we were. I had looked forward so much to getting near to these pilgrims to see if all the things I had heard and read about them were true.

The Kumbhamela Festival

They had told us that it might be fatal to get too close to the procession, but I wanted to see it, and in an unguarded moment I went out of a back door to mingle with the human sea.

It was suffocatingly hot out there. After a great many difficulties I did get quite a long way, but I eventually arrived at a human wall which blocked any kind of view. To my great good fortune, however, I met a small troop of Indian Scouts in my hour of need. They understood English and I told them that I would like to get into the front row and see what was happening. They thought this would be possible and with me in their midst they made a kind of wedge and were able to get through the crowd. Almost before we knew it we had got to the very front row and I squatted down among the Scouts. The procession had just reached the point where we were sitting. In front of the holy men a solitary woman, dressed in white, rode on a white elephant. For a short moment her eyes caught mine, but then she looked ahead again, indifferent to me, towards the snowclad peaks.

‘Who can that be?’ I asked one of the Scouts.

‘No one knows her,’ he replied with respect, ‘but they say she rode in front of the procession twelve years ago too.’

And then at last I saw the holy men of India. Their faces seemed transfigured as they walked with dignity and poise in their magnificent robes. They carried sticks that looked like snakes about two yards long and covered with ancient characters, the pure gold shining in the sun. Elephants followed with chairs of gold covered with precious stones. In these were seated the heads of monasteries, who were clothed in gold and silver-embroidered garments. It seemed almost unbelievable that human hands could have produced anything so magnificent. According to Indian mythology, every now and then the gods present the heads of a monastery with robes from their own stores, and these are handed down from one generation of monks to another.

The disciples of the holy men were throwing handfuls of coins to the crowds. I saw a poor coolie greedily throwing him-

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self on to a five rupee note (about seven shillings), which to him must have represented a whole fortune.

Next came a group of naked fanatics, covered with ashes. Some were singing their *mantras*, others were yelling and praying. Here I saw for the first time withered fingers, hands and arms. Most of the fanatics had some bodily defect or another; some had scraped the hair off their heads so that their scalps were covered with sores. Others were throwing pieces of wood with sharp nails in front of them and treading on the nails with their naked feet. Others halted to get the audience to join them in some queer chanting rhythms. They were in an ecstasy and the swaying human crowd seemed like a singing, agitated ocean, with the fanatics beating the air wildly with their arms and legs and working the rhythm up to a terrific tempo.

Suddenly the procession stopped dead and a wild confusion spread all along the line. Bad smells, the sweat and the heat seemed to coagulate. For a minute or two I felt paralysed with fear. I recalled occasions when the fanatics had run amok, the various sects starting to fight each other, when several hundred people had been killed. Panic-stricken, I shut my eyes while the crowd pressed closer and closer. I felt as if I was being stifled. Suddenly the procession began to march on again, the pressure ceased and I opened my eyes. By this time the Boy Scouts had disappeared.

Later a whole regiment of monks arrived. They were playing all kinds of strange ancient instruments. The rhythms and tunes were unearthly but not all ugly. I could not help being impressed by these men, even if I did not wholly approve of them. After all, they had said goodbye to all the comforts of life so as to be able to solve the riddle of existence. Even in mid-winter they walk about stark naked among the eternal snows and ice of the Himalayas. They are not even allowed to find shelter when sleeping. It is extraordinary that the human body can become so insensible and so hardened to cold.

The procession eventually finished. I had been away for over five hours and had completely forgotten time and place. Now I would have to find my way back to my husband and friends. I was so tired that I almost fainted when I tried to find

The Kumbhamela Festival

my way back to the Government tent. Fortunately I could see its grand lights on the hillside. Everyone had been very anxious about me. My husband had been to the head of the police to find out how he could start to look for me. The police had offered to put elephants at his disposal, as they provided the only means to pass through such dense human crowds. As it happened, however, I returned before this rescue squad set off. Dirty and dishevelled, with my hair out of place and my shoes torn, frightened and at the same time excited, I started telling them about everything I had seen before anyone had a chance to say a word. When I reached the point in my narrative where the procession had stopped and things had started to run amok, I heard Hugo groaning:

‘You, who are terrified of a mosquito, have no idea of what constitutes human danger.’

*

In the evening, as the stars came out, we drove along the Ganges in the dusk. Not a human being was to be seen now. Suddenly we were seized with a desire to bathe in the river, though not exactly for the remission of our sins. No sooner were we in the water, however, before we heard a terrific splash further down the river and something swam noiselessly towards us. Hugo, who is usually as cool as a cucumber, let out a piercing scream:

‘Get out, get out! It’s a crocodile!’

Forgetting all about holy festivals we rushed out of the water, trembling with fear and slipping on the wet stones. We dressed silently and drove the long journey back to Delhi without a halt.

The Magic of the Primitive

One Easter a hunger for something primitive made me escape from the social round in Delhi up to the Himalayas. I stayed at an hotel in the mountains, but soon discovered that there were others there who had had the same idea as myself. The result was that the social whirl flourished almost to the same degree up there as it did down in New Delhi. Finally I could stand it no longer. No one would miss me, I mused, if I went somewhere else. Unfortunately I had not the physical strength to scale the mountain walls and it was not made easier by the thin air 10,000 feet up. So I hired four carriers with a boat-shaped contraption. We bargained for a long time about the price of a day's carrying and finally agreed on three rupees per man.

I looked forward to an amusing and exciting day. I walked whenever we came to a valley but I insisted on being carried uphill. No sooner, however, had I got into my seat before the four carriers began to whine:

'Memsahib too heavy. We nearly dying of tiredness and so hungry.'

I felt more and more uncomfortable the higher we got while the carriers were puffing, panting and groaning up the mountain sides. I felt like a fat parasite making human beings slave for me. This agony of conscience was spoiling the whole trip, so I made signs to them to put me down. At this they winked slyly to each other and there was a suspicion of triumph in their grins.

I started climbing uphill, and now it was I who was doing the puffing and panting. After five minutes climbing I was finished and I just sat down. The carriers squatted round me and wanted *bachies* (tips). I decided to work out how much

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each of them was actually carrying. The chair was quite light and I weighed 150 lbs. That made at the outside 40 lbs per man. People passed us with loads of up to 90 lbs, so I felt the load couldn't be really heavy for four vigorous men. That same day I saw a coolie climbing with a load of firewood which I am sure did not weigh much under 140 lbs. For my own peace of mind I decided to experiment. I asked the biggest of the four men to sit in the chair and then I ordered the three to lift the chair while I took the place of the other among the shafts. I discovered that it was not as bad as I had thought. I even increased the pace, and none of them either groaned or panted. We continued uphill without a word. After five minutes they put the chair down and the coolie and I changed places. We were stripped of any illusions about each other and continued the rest of the journey as good friends.

The trip took us along dizzy precipices among blue mountains and eternal snow. Deep below us was the golden valley with flowering apricots and peaches. Higher up were a profusion of cherry blossom and the flaming wild rhododendron bushes. At last we arrived at the mission which was my destination. It was the place the missionaries from the plains came to for a month or two's rest during the summer. I asked the warden if I could stay there for a week.

'Are you a missionary?' he inquired.

I could not truthfully say I was, but on the other hand I feared I might be refused if I said I was the wife of a diplomat. In the end I was allowed to stay for a week, if I would take things as I found them. It was all very simple and primitive, they had neither the people nor the time to give me any extra attention.

I promised to clean my own room, make my own bed, light the stove, and so forth. I explained I was willing to do anything so long as I was allowed to stay there. The result was that I was given a small cell-like room with a view over the mountains. It was an odd experience, that week up in the snow and ice of Tibet.

During the night the moon shone into my room and the sky was sparkingly clear above the mountains. One's brain func-

tioned better on such a night and I had no desire to sleep. My thoughts seemed to flow so easily, with the past and the present shaking hands. I lay there and let my memories come and go as they wanted.

The mission was a solid and friendly place. The people lived there with their religion, tolerant of everybody. They were honourable and simple. I sighed with delight as I lay in my bed. The missionaries from the plains had nursed the sick all over India and did not object to any exertion in their desire to help others. I was just someone who had knocked on their door, though I also needed the peace of their home. Soon I was happily asleep.

I woke to a warm and lively day. The sounds in the mountains were new and to me unfamiliar. I heard the grey monkeys swear at each other. They were jumping from tree to tree, each eager to show who was the strongest. One day a flock of monkeys settled near the mission station. They started a veritable demolition job on the houses and garden and it was no good trying to shoo them away. We all tried with sticks and stones to get rid of them, but no sooner had we turned our backs before they were there again. These monkeys are a great nuisance; one is not allowed to kill them, and it is said that they eat as much as the whole population of India, but I don't know if this is true. Now and again they attack human beings, but that is unusual. The dogs at the mission were nervous and ill-tempered, perhaps because their life was generally very short. If they tried to sneak out after dark, they were certain to fall victims to the panthers.

There were snakes there, too, though they were said not to be poisonous, because of a plant they eat which only grows in the mountains and has a neutralising effect on the poison. Indian mythology has another explanation of this phenomenon. Parvati was the name of the goddess of the mountains that Siva wished to marry. She told him that she might consider marrying him, but that she did not care for all the snakes that surrounded him—Siva always walked about with snakes round his neck, his arms and legs.

Siva then promised that he would get rid of the poison in

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the mountain snakes if she would consent to marry him. She accepted him and from that day on the snakes in the mountains have not been dangerous. No one but the zoologists, I suppose, know the truth about this. But as far as I could make out, it was a very rare occurrence for anyone in the Himalayas to die of snakebite. But Parvati forgot the poisonous mountain scorpions. So if you leave your bedroom slippers on the floor during the night you must be careful, for they like to creep into them for warmth.

*

The people's voices were soft, warm and full of friendliness. But I got a shock one day when I was out walking near the mission. A small coolie boy was about ten paces behind me. He was a nice little boy, but would hardly have been much protection: one little push and down the precipice he would have gone.

On the path leading up to the pass I met two men dressed in the oddest fashion. I guessed they must be robbers. They were wearing embroidered Tibetan coats with rows of pearls round their necks and embroidered peaked silk caps. They had with them a couple of servants, or perhaps these were just robbers of a lower order. They stopped me and said a great deal, of which, of course, I did not understand a word. My little protector, who talked the dialect of the place, could not understand their tongue either. I thought they were a bit too interested in me. Luckily I had brought with me a Tibetan rosary, of the type that the Dalai Lama gives his monks when they leave their monasteries and set out on their wanderings. The Dalai Lama's emissary in Nepal had given it to me and he had assured me that it had been blessed by the Dalai Lama himself and that it possessed unique magic powers.

As the robbers approached me in a threatening fashion, I held the rosary up in front of me and made a lot of extraordinary gestures and signs in the air, mostly crosses and circles, incessantly murmuring something which I thought resembled a holy *mantra*. Their threatening manner vanished and gave way to humble understanding, almost to submission. As I

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passed on, proud and mystical, they greeted me respectfully.

When we had walked a bit further, the small coolie started to cry loudly and to tremble all over. He said a great deal that I did not understand. So we very sensibly turned to go home, and since then I have never dared to go out alone in the mountains.

*

I was sitting on the open verandah enjoying the view. The corn was just beginning to come up in the valleys. Everything looked new and emerald-green. Each cultivated plot had been hewn out of the mountain-side and every scrap of soil had been carried up to it. But the crops were growing as vigorously as in a well-kept Danish field. The small mountain donkeys passed the mission all the time on their way up with loads of earth from the valley on their backs. A large sack hung from each side, and from their necks several rows of red and green bells jingled merrily as they walked.

One day the old cook came and asked me if I really meant that I would like to cook the dinner. I had promised to make rissoles with parsley sauce, and he would very much like to learn how to do it. He was an amusing old fellow, though his ideas about dates were not very reliable. He told me among other things that he was born in 1897 and a bit later he disclosed that he had been married in 1894. His wife had died four months earlier.

‘But she has still got all sorts of surprises for me,’ he told me. ‘She has hidden money away in the strangest places in our hut. I find a few annas here and some rupees there, and in this way I have a bit to live on in my old age.’

He was up at five every morning, when he could be seen on the crest of the hill gazing towards a point down in the valley. It was just possible to detect a small white spot—the Christian church. His wife and their four children were all buried there. Every morning he used to stand up on his peak wishing them good morning and every evening he would bid them goodnight.

Once a month he had a free day; then he would leave about four in the morning and so manage to be down by the graves

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about ten. 'They seem nearer to me down there,' he said. 'I feel happy when I sit by their graves. I feel I have something to live for so long as I can have this great joy once a month. I talk to them all the time while I am sitting there. They were all Christians. My wife sang Christian *mantras* to us every morning before we started our work and we sat with a picture of the God Kristus in front of us. When we sat like that it was almost as if we were praying to our own gods, although we had been told that they did not exist.'

He looked pleadingly at me and asked:

'Does the Memsahib think her God is angry with us, because we have not quite forgotten our old gods?'

'You must ask your Sahib about those things, dear friend,' I said prudently.

Surely it was the task of the missionaries to discuss such delicate matters with their cook. But I added confidentially:

'I pray to my own God and to yours at the same time.'

He looked surprised at me and then replied:

'That is exactly what I do too—at the bottom of my heart.'

He hesitated for a moment before he cautiously continued:

'Can I be sure that the Memsahib is a true child of God? The Memsahib does not talk like the others at this station.'

'Are you yourself a true child of God, then?' I said, to gain time.

'I am the child of all gods,' he replied.

'So am I,' I whispered, and his face lit up like a sun when he said:

'Will the Memsahib say a prayer to the gods with me, for I think we belong to the same family.'

I was rather taken aback, but he looked so pleadingly at me that I quite naturally folded my hands and there before the high mountains the strangest prayer was chanted by the cook:

'God, our Holy Father, Kristus, the first God's only Son, all eternal gods in heaven and on this earth, here this Memsahib and I sit before your exalted faces. You must forgive that we believe in all of you. Thank you that this Memsahib also carries this belief in her heart and prays to all of you. Now I am no longer quite alone in my belief. Will you all bless us and

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lead us safely down the valley where our dear ones are resting, so that we may be united with them and rise with them one day?’



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